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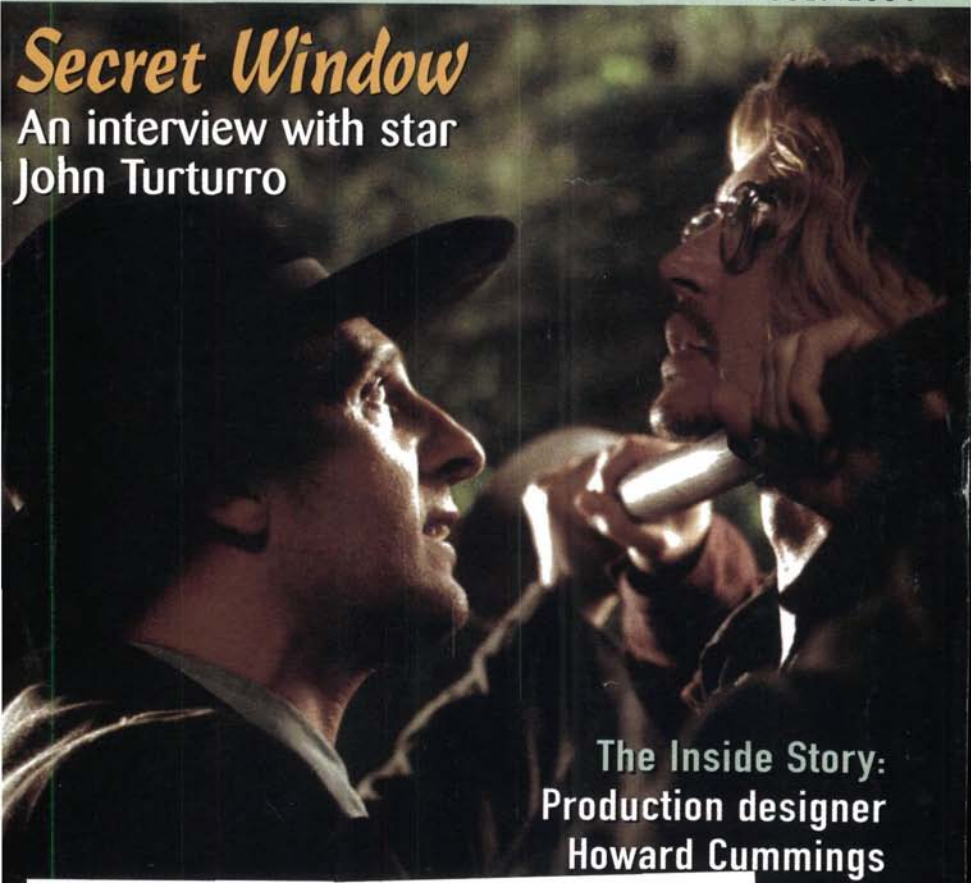

Secret Window

An interview with star John Turturro

The Inside Story: Production designer Howard Cummings

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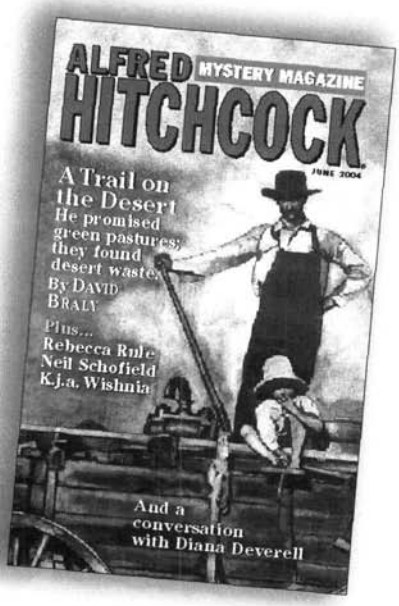

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A CLASSIC
by Janet Hutchings

The copy of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* that's finally delivered to Johnny Depp in the new Stephen King movie *Secret Window* looks much like the first issue to roll off the presses in 1941, when it was a prime source of entertainment for thousands of soldiers and other "Greatest Generation" readers. At a glance you could mistake it for some of the issues Stephen King would have read as a child a generation later, or for the issues current when he first began writing and submitting to *EQMM*. Watching Johnny Depp's frantic hunt for a copy of our magazine, seeing it with its pages excised and tumbled to the ground, I couldn't help but reflect that it's the perfect prop for the "Generation X" writer Depp plays—that its classic look of the 'forties detective story still conveys exactly what it did way back then: excitement, wonder, adventure, suspense.

Like people, magazines confront a choice as they age: engage in a little nip-and-tuck and Botox, or flaunt longevity and the distinction that comes with it. As the editor of a 63-year-old magazine that's being seen this year by millions of moviegoers, young and old, in the hands of Hollywood's most alluring young male star, I'm glad the temptation to give our publication a face-lift never seriously gripped any of our publishers. To stay relevant to, in touch with, or just plain "on the radar" of new generations of readers, it seems to have turned out best that we decided to remain who we are.

Not that *EQMM* has ever been resistant to change. What distinguishes the classic from the merely old is the universality of the former, something achieved by a publication only by adapting to changing times. *EQMM* got a reminder of that recently when a debate broke out on the Readers Forum of our Web site (themysteryplace.com) over our return to the style of the most lurid of the 'forties pulp-art illustrators. How surprised today's twenty-somethings would be if they realized how tame the art that encases their fiction is as compared to the newsstand covers of the 'forties and 'fifties. In those days, many of the digest magazines such as *EQMM* went so far in their depiction of sexuality and violence that special plain-type covers had to be sent to subscribers, in whose homes children might otherwise view "inappropriate" images. But sensibilities change. What was then considered perfectly consistent—a buxom, cleavage-revealing "dame" used to sell fiction by such illustrious authors as Arthur Miller and Dashiell Hammett—raises hackles if *EQMM* reprints it today. The trick, it would seem, is to catch the spirit of what was great about those good old days, but have the sensitivity and flexibility to see it all from a new perspective.

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Tom Tolnay is a former editor-in-chief of *Back Stage* magazine. He is also a widely published short story writer whose work has appeared not only in *EQMM* and *AHMM* but in consumer magazines such as *The Saturday Evening Post, Family Circle,* and *Chic.* Two novels and a collection of stories bear his name, and his latest story collection, *Selling America,* is scheduled for publication by Royal Fireworks Press in 2004.

EQMM GOES TO THE MOVIES

a review

by Tom Tolnay

Whenever a motion picture is based on a book by an author with a worldwide readership, fans can be expected to swarm the movie houses, waspishly ready to sting if they find Hollywood has "messed with" their hero's story. That irresistible urge to compare the two is being played out right now in regard to Stephen King's novella "Secret Window, Secret Garden" (from the Signet paperback *Four Past Midnight*) and the Columbia Pictures production of it as *Secret Window,* starring Johnny Depp.

Of course, the book is nearly always regarded as more rewarding than the film by fans and critics alike. Good reasons for this bias exist, the most obvious being there's more "space" to explore the subtleties of character, language, and plot in 140 pages of small print than on the silver screen in 106 minutes. But filmed interpretations have compelling paybacks, too: an extreme closeup of a wary eye, a flickering blend of shadow and light, a daring gesture introduced into a scene are all capable of conveying in an instant what a novelist might need hundreds of words to express.

In the case of *Secret Window,* however, both film fan and bookworm have been granted a special dispensation in that comparison seems immaterial when it comes to the "bottom line" of this thriller: Both versions allow the audience to leave the theater or to close the last page with a sharp awareness of having been entertained nearly out of their wits. This effect has been realized not because the screenplay adaptation by director David Koepp manages to squeeze every goose-pimpled detail out of Stephen King's novella. Rather it's because moviegoers, like readers before them, are never quite permitted by Koepp to get a firm grip on whose mental state they need to fear the most—that of the protagonist, writer Mort Rainey, or his oppressor, self-proclaimed writer John Shooter.

Secret Window focuses on a dilemma that a would-be writer will not stumble upon in King's book of storytelling advice, *On Writing:* namely, what to do if you're accused of plagiarism by a madman who is determined either to get due credit or kill you. Therein lies the story's engine, and with this declaration by Shooter, "You stole my story," a series of psychological and physical misfortunes are set loose like snarling animals released from a cage. These calamities are skillfully exploited by

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Facing Up

by Melodie Johnson Howe

"Movie stars should never have children, Diana," Ella Sands greeted me at the top of the dramatically curved stairs, which seemed to be designed for grand entrances and exits.

"Is that because we spend our lives acting like children?" I asked, hurrying up the steps.

"Because we're artists." Her famous voice was soft but sure. Seventy-five years had not reduced its seductive power, nor had it diminished the inherent beauty of the once famous star who had been an icon of her generation.

A movie star whose credits include *Coogan's Bluff*, with Clint Eastwood, and *The Moonshine War*, with Alan Alda, Melodie Johnson Howe exchanged life in front of the cameras for the writer's life in the 1980s, and hasn't looked back since—except to make Hollywood the setting for her most recent series featuring actress Diana Poole. (One of the Poole stories appeared in *Best American Mystery Stories.)* Who better to open our second issue devoted to the movies? ¶

We went into her sitting room. She settled in a chair that had been intentionally placed under a portrait painted at the height of her career. The young, beautiful Ella peered down from her gilded frame with a slightly perplexed expression at the old woman she had become. Next to Ella a table lamp glowed with a soft pink light that smoothed her lines and the hollows around her eyes and illuminated her still beautiful auburn hair. Ella had controlled her image and her career, including the placement of chairs and lights, with an iron discipline. Brushing my determinedly blond hair back from my face, I sat across from her.

"I know I've become a bit Blanche DuBois-ish, but what the hell, I've earned it."

I laughed. "It's good to see you. It's been a long time." But I knew this wasn't a social call. It never was with Ella Sands. She only asked to see you when she wanted something.

"Did you know Kera got married?" Her sharp green eyes took me in.

"I heard." I couldn't keep the bitterness out of my voice.

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"Dr. Logan Bradford. A plastic surgeon. Can you believe Kera married a plastic surgeon? That's like marrying your gynecologist. There's something obscene about it." She tossed her head back and laughed her I-just-got-out-of-bed-with-a-man laugh.

I forced a smile. "Somebody has to marry them."

"But not my daughter."

"I hear he's a brilliant plastic surgeon." I couldn't think of anything else to say.

"Do you remember the actor Farley Sims? He was brilliant, too. When the camera was rolling I would have trusted Farley with my life. He was that good of an actor. But when the camera was off, I never went near him because he hated women, he was duplicitous, and he'd walk over anyone who got in his way. Dr. Logan Bradford reminds me of Farley."

"I'm sorry." I didn't feel any sympathy for her daughter. I had never liked Kera. She and I were under contract to Universal Studios back in the 'seventies when we were both young and unknown. She seemed to think she was there by right, being the daughter of a star. She never bothered to learn her lines, or be on time, while I couldn't sleep for fear I'd be late for my makeup call. And if I did sleep I dreamed of being in front of the camera without ever having read the script.

"I think he's experimenting on her." Ella spoke in a whisper.

"Experimenting?"

"I don't recognize my daughter anymore. If you passed her on the street you wouldn't know her, Diana. My God, I've had my eyes done twice and my face lifted once. But I still look like me. I can't see myself in my daughter's face. Kera looks like *he* created her, not *me*." Possession hardened her voice.

"Kera's a strong woman, Ella. Why does she allow it?"

"She was never strong. Just willful. I think she's afraid of him, for whatever reason, and because of that she's allowing him to mutilate her, destroy her. I can't stand looking at my own daughter." She reached out and pressed my hand in hers. "Talk to her, Diana. See if you can find out what kind of hold he has on her."

The last time I saw Kera she was in bed with my husband. That was ten years ago.

"You know that Kera and I haven't spoken in years," I replied. "I don't want to get involved with her."

She let my hand drop in my lap as if it had suddenly developed leprosy, and leaned back in her chair, staring at me imperiously. Movie stars are not used to being rejected, even if they are ex-movie stars. "If Colin were alive he would do it for me."

"Well, he's not." My husband had died a year ago of a heart attack, leaving me with a mortgaged teardown in Malibu, an old Jaguar, two Oscars for Best Screenplay, and a sense of loss I could never fill.

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"If I were still number one at the box office, you'd do it for me," she observed unpleasantly.

"That's unfair even for you."

"It's reality. I think Kera's husband wants to kill me."

"What?"

"It's not an ageing woman's paranoia, Diana."

"Why would he want to kill you?"

"Money. My jewels. The real estate I've invested in. This house. I wasn't like you and Colin, who spent everything you had. I never spent a penny. I'm worth over forty million, and it took a lifetime for me to earn it. Today some stars earn that for one movie. My God, they don't know anything about acting and they make that kind of money."

"Logan Bradford must make a lot of money on his own, Ella."

"He owes people. He has always lived beyond his means."

"So he owes people. That doesn't mean he wants to harm you."

"You think I'm crazy?"

"No, I think you're trying anything to get me to reunite you with your daughter."

"I took a chance on your husband back in the 'seventies when he was a nobody. It was having me, Ella Sands, in his first movie that put him on the map as a screenwriter." For emphasis she tapped a perfectly manicured finger just above her still abundant cleavage.

"Colin wasn't my husband then. And it was a brilliant script with or without you."

Suddenly her shoulders slumped and her face went slack, making her look aged. "I'm an old woman, Diana," she pleaded dramatically.

I grinned. "You *are* a wonderful actress."

"I can see this isn't working." She straightened. Her face tightened. "You still blame my daughter for going to bed with Colin, don't you?"

"I can't help it."

"Why blame her? Have you ever thought of blaming Colin? For God's sake, I went to bed with him, too. It may have been a brilliant script, Diana, but that little seduction didn't hurt his chances with me."

"That was before I knew him."

She stood. "I'm sorry I called you."

"Why did you, Ella?"

"I always thought you had your head screwed on right. Quite a feat in this town. I thought you'd understand that because I helped Colin you would now help me."

"That was a long time ago."

"Not to me. It seems like yesterday. My entire life seems like yesterday."

"You never had much interest in your daughter. Why now?"

"I can't see my reflection in her face." She walked into her bed-

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room and shut the door. I was left sitting in the eerily quiet pink-shaded room. Not even a clock ticked. I wondered if I would have helped Ella, no matter what I thought about Kera, if she were still number one at the box office? After all, I was a middle-aged actress who needed work. Unable to come up with an answer, I walked down the grand staircase. No one applauded my exit.

That night I stood on my small rotting redwood deck facing the Pacific Ocean with a glass of red wine in my hand and the warm salty wind pulling gently at my hair. I was trying to figure out why I had never blamed Colin for going to bed with Kera Sands. At that time, I had attempted the classic French shrug where Colin was concerned. *C'est la vie.* Except I'm American down to my toes, and my shrug was as stiff as a Puritan's soul and my French has always been mangled.

My gaze drifted from the ocean to the narrow walkway that separated my small house from Ryan Johns's multimillion-dollar enormous white blob of a mansion; it billowed up next to me like a giant illuminated marshmallow. Near the moonlit walkway I saw Ryan lying in a heap under his hibiscus bush. I balanced my wine on the railing, took the hose that curled in the corner, turned the water on full force, and sprayed him with it. Gasping for air, he fought his way out of his stupor into a sitting position.

"Tidal wave! I'm drowning," he sputtered.

"You're drowning yourself in booze," I yelled back, turning the hose off.

"I thought I was doing a rewrite on the *Titanic.*" He staggered to his feet. "I love it that you look after me, Diana."

Ryan was a big burly Irishman who looked as if he'd been born in a pub, except he was born in Connecticut to a wealthy banking family that didn't understand their son's creativity. Or so he told me drunkenly, over and over, the night I mistakenly went out to dinner with him. His thick reddish-blond hair formed lovely ringlets when it was wet. They made me smile. He shook himself like a St. Bernard and almost fell over. Righting himself, he staggered up the steps to his veranda and announced: "I just sold a script for five million today. I bet your husband never did that."

"Colin's dead, Ryan. Why do you keep competing with him?"

"Nobody's dead to an Irishman." He collapsed on his chaise longue and began to snore. I took my wine and went inside.

Sometime during the early-morning hours of the next day Ella Sands fell down those dramatic stairs and broke her neck. I stood in my kitchen drinking coffee and watching Dr. Logan Bradford being interviewed on the morning TV news. Standing in front of Ella's palatial Beverly Hills white brick house, he told the reporters that Ella might have had an aneurysm or a mild stroke,

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causing her fall. Kera, his wife and Ella's daughter, was too distraught, he explained, to talk to anybody. I studied Logan Bradford's face. He had sharp, possessive eyes, the black hair of a gigolo, and pale, antiseptic skin. I turned the TV off and wondered what Ella Sands was doing out of bed in the early-morning hours. Maybe she hadn't been acting when I last talked to her. Maybe she really had been afraid for her life. And maybe if she had been number one at the box office, I would have offered my help. Maybe.

Four days later, along with other mourners, I was standing in Ella Sands' living room, dressed in my black suit, white pearls, and wide-brimmed black straw hat. Show-business people have a difficult time at funerals. We forget we're at a wake and immediately begin to talk about our next project, the script we're reading, and the money we're making. But we never talk about the money we're not making, or the script we're not reading, or the project we're not shooting. That would be too close to death.

Ryan Johns sidled up to me. His face was so sunburnt that the lines around his mouth and across his forehead showed white. He wore dark glasses.

"What happened to you?"

"You happened. You left me out on my veranda all night so I could fry in the morning sun. And this looks good. You should have seen me four days ago."

I laughed. "You're not my responsibility, Ryan."

His expression turned serious. "Yes, I am."

"Diana Poole?" A dark-haired man with long, delicate fingers approached me. "I'm Dr. Logan Bradford. Kera's my wife."

"It's nice to meet you."

He took my hand in his cold grip. "I'm sorry it has to be under these circumstances."

"Where is Kera? I've been looking for her. I wanted to pay my respects."

"She's not able to come down. But she wondered if you could go up to her. She's in Ella's sitting room."

"Of course."

"Thank you." He moved quickly away as if he didn't want me to stare too long into his eyes.

Leaving Ryan, I went up the stairs and knocked on the sitting-room door. A faint voice told me to come in. Kera sat in her mother's chair under her mother's portrait. Ella was right; I would not have recognized her. Her nose was small and perfect and therefore strangely unattractive in its careful blandness. Her cheeks had been implanted and raised, causing the bottom half of her face to appear longer than I had remembered. Her sharp, defiant chin, so much like her mother's, had been softened. There were no lines, no life in her face. She didn't look like she had come from

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the passion of a man and a woman. She looked as if she'd been wrought from her husband's cold fingers. Her thick auburn hair had been dyed a heavy black.

"Do you know I don't even know who my father is?" she said simply. "Mother wasn't sure. Growing up, I hoped he was James Dean and it was because he had died so young that I had never heard from him." She smiled an unfamiliar smile. "It's been a long time. How are you?"

"Fine." I sat down in the same chair I had sat in earlier that week.

"I hear you're acting again," she said.

"I need the money and it's the only thing I know how to do."

"You're lucky you know how to do something. I never bothered to learn. I know you're here for Mother and not me. I suppose everyone downstairs is here for her and not me," she said resentfully. "Did you meet Logan?"

"Briefly. Kera, I want to talk to you about a conversation I had with your mother."

"Did Logan come upstairs with you?" Nervously twisting a lace-edged handkerchief with hands that looked much older than her face, she peered at the sitting-room door.

"No, I came alone."

"I thought I heard something. Would you check for me, see if he's in the hallway?"

I opened the door and found Ryan on his knees listening at the keyhole.

"What are you doing?" I asked in a low voice.

He clasped hands together. "Will you marry me?"

"Who is it?" Kera asked anxiously.

"It's just Ryan. He's drunk."

"I am not," he mouthed indignantly.

I closed the door on him. "Why did you think it was your husband?"

"Mother's death has put me on edge." Pulling at the hem of her black dress, she shifted uneasily in her chair. "Did you know Mother adored Ryan Johns? She had an affair with him. I think she had a soft spot for writers. I had an affair with him, too. It was around the time . . ." She stopped.

"That I found you in bed with my husband? Maybe, like your mother, you also have a soft spot for writers."

"I think you're still angry at me, Diana."

"After ten years, the word angry is a little extreme."

"Why do we always blame the woman and never the man?" Her strangely tilted eyes met mine. I could still see her mother's familiar glint in them.

"Your mother asked me the same question."

"Do you remember when we were young, maybe nineteen, driving

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down Sunset Boulevard? And you pointed out all the houses that you liked, trying to decide which one you would live in when you were a rich movie star. I never pointed out one because I lived in a movie star's house. And now it is mine. And Logan's," she added ruefully.

"Kera, before your mother died she told me she was worried about you."

"Are you sure you have the right mother?" She forced a laugh, a pale copy of Ella's deep sexual laugh.

"Ella wanted me to contact you, to see if you were happy in your marriage."

"Mother and I were like star-crossed lovers, always communicating through liaisons. Always misinterpreting one another. I am going to miss her, Diana." Tears slowly dropped, one by one, down her creaseless face. She was like a statue crying.

"She was also worried about herself," I persisted.

"When wasn't she?" She dabbed at her cheeks.

"Kera, she thought that your husband wanted to kill her."

She bit at her lower lip, then asked, "Did you believe her?"

"No. But now that she . . ."

"Fell down the stairs? Diana, I've always lacked confidence. Mother thought my lack of confidence was a weapon, something I contrived just to get back at her, to make her feel inept because I was a failure. She didn't like Logan because he gave me confidence. He did a few things to my face that made me feel better about myself. That's all." Her voice was shrill and defensive.

"I just thought you should hear what she told me."

She stared into her lap. When she looked at me, there was fear in her eyes. "He keeps finding things wrong with me. He tells me I need this done, that done." She grabbed my hand. "I know what I look like. Oh God, he has a mistress and—"

The door opened and Logan Bradford came in. "Are you ladies having a nice chat?" His long, meticulously kept fingers smoothed his slick hair. I didn't like the way he said the word "ladies."

"Yes, we are, Logan," Kera said submissively.

He looked up at Ella's portrait. "I think we should hang that downstairs in the living room. What do you think, Kera?"

"Whatever you want, Logan."

"Really?" He stared at her with contempt. "Then what I want is for you to rest."

"Do you mind, Diana? I am tired."

"Not at all."

Outside on the lawn, under the liquidambar trees, the mourners, peering from behind their sunglasses, conversed in somber groups. Near the portable bar I saw Ryan talking to a young actress. He was writing something down on a piece of paper. She was swaying her body against his while she flipped her long

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golden hair back from her creaseless face.

"I want to talk to you," I said, joining them.

"Diana, you have such a gentle way about you. This is Sydney spelled with 'i.' I haven't quite figured out just where the 'i' is placed."

"Anywhere you want," she cooed, and swayed away.

"Her phone number." He waved it under my nose, then put it in his pocket.

"Why were you listening at the door?"

"I wanted to hear what Kera had to say about her mother."

"Why?"

He pushed his glasses down to the tip of his crooked pugilistic nose and stared at me with intelligent, mischievous, red-rimmed eyes. "I loved Ella. When I was a very young lad and new in town I met her at a party. She took me home and into her bed. I couldn't believe it. The first woman I bedded in Hollywood was Ella Sands. I still can't believe it."

"I hear she went to bed with most men."

"But only one at a time," he countered. "I felt very special. The next morning I saw Kera sitting out by that pool." He gestured with his drink to an Olympic-size pool shimmering baby-blue in the relentless sunlight. "She stared at me as if I were—well, what I was—just another man coming into her mother's bed for the night then tiptoeing out in the morning. But it was a look I'll never forget. One of true hatred. But I understood it. I felt sorry for her."

"Kera told me you had an affair with her, too."

"But much later. It was like trying to make love to a shadow."

"Her mother's?"

"Yes. What do you think of Logan Bradford?"

"He's a domineering snake."

"I love the way women talk. Images slightly askew, but the meaning so clear."

"Ella told me that Bradford wanted to kill her."

His eyebrows arched over his sunglasses. "Are you saying she didn't fall down the stairs?"

"I don't know what I'm saying. You can go back to Sydney with an 'i,' wherever it is. I'm going home."

"I'll go with you."

"Where's your car?"

"They took my license away. I had to take a cab here." He guided me across the lawn. "The driver couldn't find Beverly Hills. And I only know how to get around this town when I'm drunk. So we got lost in a town called Mar Vista, where you cannot see the ocean from any point. Why are words never what they mean in this world of ours, Diana?" he asked forlornly.

"You mean like the word 'love'?" I asked. Again I felt the pain of loss.

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With the sun in our eyes and the palm trees swaying in the warm breeze like melancholy hula dancers, Ryan and I waited in the driveway for the valet to bring my car around. Logan Bradford stepped out of the house.

"May I speak to you for a moment? Alone." He took my arm and guided me away from Ryan. Leaning close, he asked, "What did my wife tell you?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"What did she say about me?"

"We talked about Ella."

"She hated her mother. She wouldn't spend time talking about her. What did she tell you?" He pressed his steellike fingers into my arm.

"Let go of me."

"Whatever she said to you is a lie."

Ryan stepped between us. "Your car is here, Diana," he announced preemptively.

In the car Ryan asked, "What did the domineering snake want?"

"He wanted to know what Kera and I were talking about. He thought it was about him."

"I hear he has chiseled her into *his* version of a woman. Except I also hear he doesn't like women."

"He likes us well enough to be having an affair with one. Kera looks terrible." I turned left onto Sunset Boulevard and flipped the visor down. I drove past some of the same mansions that years ago Kera and I had driven by. I tried to remember which ones I had chosen to live in when I became rich and famous. But I couldn't.

"Why did she let him do it to her?" Ryan asked.

"She's afraid of him."

"Could we turn the air conditioning on?"

"It doesn't work."

"Why do you cling to this old Jag?"

"Because I can't afford a new car."

"Let me buy you one, then you can drive me around town and I won't get lost in Mar Vista where you can't see the ocean."

"Ryan, why did you go to bed with Kera?"

"I'll go to bed with anybody. I also thought, in my infinite self-centeredness, that I could keep her from seducing your husband."

"You must not have been very good."

"I'll have you know that I performed like a stallion. Well, maybe a very lusty Shetland pony. If you remember, you and Colin had separated over some stupid argument."

"I don't even remember what it was. I don't even remember what great mansion I wanted to live in when I was nineteen."

"Mansion? You're not desperate enough to live in a mansion. What are you talking about?"

"Time." As I curved further west on Sunset I could feel those big

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houses and my youth receding from me like ocean waves that lap at your ankles and then swiftly pull away.

"I'll tell you why you and Colin were arguing," Ryan said. "It was two creative temperamental egos colliding. If you hadn't decided to make up with Colin and then come back to the house in the middle of the night to surprise him, you wouldn't have found him with Kera. What I mean is, he would never have gone to bed with her if he knew you had wanted to come back. Why do women always want to surprise men, anyway? I think you unconsciously want to catch us at our worst."

"Maybe we want to catch you at your best."

"If that's the case, then Colin, the great man of taste and discretion, failed, didn't he?"

I looked sharply at Ryan. He was grinning, pleased at the thought of a discredited Colin. Too pleased.

We stopped at the light where Sunset Boulevard ends and the Pacific Ocean begins. The waves splashed on sand so smooth and flat that it looked like a cheap beige carpet.

Late that night the doorbell rang, jarring me awake. I peered at the clock. It was eleven-thirty. Out of habit, I looked at the other half of the bed for help. It was empty; Colin's pillow firmed and plumped. Untouched. I got up and threw on my robe and padded across the cool Mexican pavers into the hallway. Peering through the peephole, I saw Kera's waxen face illuminated by the porch light. Fear pulled at her lips and eyes, distorting her into grotesqueness. I opened the door.

"This is the only place I could think of where Logan wouldn't know to find me." Half dazed, she wandered into the living room. "I'll leave if you want me to."

"Don't be silly. I'll get you a drink."

When I came back with a brandy, she was standing out on the balcony staring at the ocean. Her hand shook when she took the glass.

"What happened?" I asked.

"The night Mother died, Logan wasn't at home with me. I thought he was with his mistress. This evening I confronted him about what Mother had told you and he went into a rage. I'm afraid of him. Can I stay here just till morning?"

"Well, I . . ."

"Please, Diana."

"I'll put you up on the sofa."

"Who's that?" She pulled a gun from her coat pocket and aimed toward the walkway and the swaying hibiscus bush.

"Don't turn the bloody hose on me," Ryan roared, staggering to his feet.

"It's Ryan Johns. He's drunk," I told her.

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"Will somebody help me with him?" a woman whined. Golden Sydney with an 'i' came into the light of my deck. "This is the worst evening of my life." Her eyes came to rest on the gun quivering in Kera's hand.

"Hello, Sydni," Kera greeted her coldly.

"Kera?" Sydni froze.

"*You* had an awful evening," Ryan suddenly bellowed at the young actress, then began to make his case to us. "I had to spend it talking to a viped vaper. Vapid viper. Flipping her hair, clicking her nails, licking her lips. She even flossed."

"I was bored," Sydni snapped at him, forgetting the gun in Kera's hand. "I went out with you because you said you had a part for me in your new script. And all you did was talk about your parents not understanding you. I thought you got over that by the time you're middle-aged."

"Middle *what?*"

Sydni turned on Kera. "And if you're trying to scare me with that gun it won't work."

"Gun?" Ryan tried to focus.

"Did you think it wasn't proper to see my husband on the night of Mother's funeral?" Kera asked her.

"Logan thought he should be with you and not me tonight."

"Jesus, it is a gun," Ryan said. "Why do you have a gun?" He lurched toward my stair rail and bumped into Sydni. "Oh Christ, the vipid vaper is still here."

Kera slipped the gun back into her pocket and walked into my house.

Now Sydni ranted at me. "He slobbered all over me, never once mentioned his new script, and then looked at his watch, leaped up, and said we have to leave. And tell that bitch if she's trying to scare Logan and me it won't work." She turned on Ryan. "God, you're disgusting." She stalked back down the narrow passage toward Pacific Coast Highway and her car.

"Am I disgusting, Diana?" he asked, like a little boy.

"Yes."

"Why does Kera have a gun?"

"She's afraid of Bradford."

"I am disgusting."

"Go to bed."

I went into the living room and closed the sliding-glass doors and locked them. Kera sat on the sofa. Her hair was dead black against her eerily pale skin. Exhausted, I sat down across from her.

"How long has your husband been seeing Sydni?" I asked.

"About three months. She's perfect."

"She's young."

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"He hasn't done a thing to her. I want you to know, Diana, that I didn't go to bed with your husband to take him away from you."

"You couldn't have done that even if you had wanted to."

"I went to bed with him because Mother had gone to bed with him. When I was old enough I made a pact with myself. I would seduce every one of Mother's lovers. And it would be my secret until it was the right time to tell her, until it would wound her deeply. But I never found the right time," she added desolately.

I stared at Colin's two Oscars on the mantel. Casting their twin shadows on the wall, they glimmered with sleek pride.

"What did Colin say to you when you went to bed with him?" I asked.

"Why do you want to know what he said?"

"He cared about words."

"Who can remember? I didn't mean anything to Colin."

"He wouldn't have gone to bed with you if you'd meant nothing to him. What did he say?"

I had never asked Colin for an explanation and he had never offered one.

"We had great sex, that was all. It was nothing."

Only in Hollywood can great sex equal nothing, I thought. Again I could see her mother's eyes glinting out at me and I knew she was lying. I knew it had meant something.

"I'll take the gun." I held out my hand. She hesitated, then reached into her pocket and handed it to me.

"Who was this for?"

"Me. Maybe Logan. I'm tired of being hurt. Of being second best."

I made a bed for her on the sofa, then I went back to my room. But I couldn't sleep, not with a woman I didn't trust on my sofa and her loaded gun on my nightstand. At two o'clock, the doorbell rang. I peered at Colin's pillow. Then, wrapping my robe around myself, I hurried out to the foyer. Kera was already there.

"It's Logan," she said frantically.

I looked out the peephole. "I don't see anybody."

"He must've gone around to the ocean side of the house. Where's the gun?"

"You don't need it." We went into the living room. Logan Bradford appeared on my deck and began pounding hard on the sliding-glass door. The glass shook in its frame. I unlocked the door and slid it open about an inch.

"She doesn't want to see you. Go away or I'll call the police."

He shoved the door wide and pushed me out of the way with such force I slammed against the wall, striking my head. Kera screamed and rushed toward my bedroom. Bradford strode down the hall after her. Dazed, I leaned on the back of a chair.

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"No more. No more, Kera," he yelled from my room. Then there was the sound of a slap. Kera whimpered. The gun went off. I staggered into the bedroom. The smell of nitrite and the intimate smell of my own perfume mixed with the salt air. I leaned against the doorjamb. Logan Bradford was sprawled on his back on the bed, his head on Colin's pillow. Blood spread across his chest and seeped from his open mouth onto my sheets. Kera stood at the foot of the bed, the gun still in her hand. She slowly lifted it to her head. I lurched for her and grabbed it. Collapsing in a chair, she covered her expressionless face with her ageing hands.

Three hours later, I stood on Ryan's veranda pounding on his French doors. Since my bedroom was a murder scene I had noplace else to go. Yellow tape had been draped around my small house. The lights were still on and the police were still there. I had told them everything that had happened. Kera had called her lawyer, who had come to the house. She was allowed to leave in his custody. The French doors finally opened.

"Am I dreaming?" Ryan muttered.

"I need to stay here for the night. Or what's left of it. Kera shot the good doctor in my bedroom."

"Kera did? Are you all right?"

"Didn't you hear the commotion?"

"I sleep deeply when I'm passed out. But if I'd been awake and sober I would have rescued you." He guided me into his overly decorated living room.

"Forget it. I'm too old to be rescued." I sank into a sofa that was obese with down feathers and watched Ryan as he fixed us drinks. He didn't look like a man who had been asleep.

Two days later, Ryan and I stood in my bedroom staring at my new Beautyrest mattress. The other one had been soaked with Dr. Logan Bradford's blood.

"The least Kera could have done is pay for it," he said. "Would you like to christen it?" He wiggled his eyebrows at me.

"No."

"Inaugurate it?"

"No."

"Diana, it's no longer Colin's bed."

"Is that why I feel so betrayed?"

Grabbing me, he pressed my body to his and awkwardly kissed me. I stepped back from his embrace. Flushed, he managed an expression of bemusement, but his blue eyes shone with rejection.

"I'm sorry, Ryan. But I keep thinking about the night Kera shot her husband. Seeing him lying on my bed. I feel as if I've somehow been taken advantage of. As if I had been in a play. And everybody was acting their roles except me, because I didn't know the script."

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"Forget it. You had an out-of-body experience. It happens when you're witnessing something horrifying. I felt it just now when you couldn't wait to get away from me."

"Ryan, why did you go out with Sydni that night?"

"Why not?"

"It just seems odd that Sydni should show up here exactly when Kera did. And what about the police cars, the ambulance? You had to hear the sirens."

"I have rewrites to do and a bottle of scotch to finish."

"Ryan, answer me."

"I felt sorry for Kera. Somebody has to feel sorry for the shadows of our world."

"I don't understand."

"Kera wanted me to bring Sydni back to my house at the same time she would be waiting on the deck of your house."

"Because she knew that Sydni would call Bradford and tell him where she was?"

"I didn't know he would be shot. But he did kill her mother and mutilate her."

"Did he?"

"Leave it be, Diana. Like Colin, I just felt sorry for her."

"Are you saying Colin went to bed with Kera because he felt sorry for her?"

"Thanks for not wiping my kiss off with the back of your hand, Diana."

He left me staring at my bare, pristine mattress. My feeling of betrayal turned to anger. I grabbed my keys and purse and drove to Beverly Hills.

The sun was going down, casting the white brick house into pink shadows. I knocked on the front door, but no one answered. I walked around to the back. The liquidambar trees were turning black in the dimming light. I stepped in through an open den door, walked into the hallway, and up the curved stairs. Kera, with her back to me, was in the sitting room staring up at her mother's portrait: The young Ella Sands peered down at her grown daughter with that same perplexed expression. When I closed the door behind me, Kera turned quickly around.

"Diana? You have the same look on your face that you had when you found me in bed with Colin."

I leaned against the door. "You set me up. I was the perfect witness, wasn't I? Someone who doesn't like you, who wouldn't lie for you."

She tossed her dead-black hair back from her face. "My mother unintentionally set you up. She told me she had talked to you. She told me she thought Logan wanted to harm us. She had it all

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wrong, as usual. But that's because she never paid any attention to me." Self-pity pulled at her lips.

"So you shoved her down the stairs."

"I told her about how I had gone to bed with each one of her lovers. She didn't want to hear it. She ran out into the hallway. I couldn't stand the expression on her face. Her self-hatred."

"Or was it your own self-hatred you couldn't stand? Did Ryan know you killed her?"

"No. Nor did he know I intended to kill Logan. I just got him to take out Sydni."

"But why kill your husband?"

"Logan was fine as long as he did exactly what I wanted, which was to erase Mother's likeness from my face. His reward was marrying into a small fortune and keeping his mistress. But he guessed I had killed Mother. Funny, he was afraid that I was going to tell people that he did it."

"One more question. What really happened between you and Colin—besides great sex?" I added sarcastically.

"I already told you."

"No, you were lying. I could see it in your eyes. You know I can still see your mother in your eyes?"

Kera stiffened.

"And look at your hands. They look exactly like your mother's."

She peered down at her hands, clenching and unclenching them.

"Haven't you heard, Kera? We all end up looking like our mothers. Did you really think you would be the only one who didn't?"

"That's not true. It's not true! And your Colin was a big failure in bed. He just wanted to put his arms around me and hold me." Resentment narrowed her eyes. "I've never wanted to get out of a man's bed so fast in my entire life. God, I was glad when you showed up." Again she attempted her mother's worldly laugh and failed.

"Oh, Kera, you should have let him comfort you."

It was dark when I returned to Malibu. I poured a glass of wine and went outside and breathed in the ocean air and tried to remember the touch of my husband's embrace. In the walkway, the hibiscus bush shook. I peered down at the heap that was Ryan Johns. In his stupor he muttered and kicked his feet as if he were running away from something. Everybody is running away in this town, trying to get out from under the shadow of the more famous, the more wealthy, the more creative, the more loved, the more beautiful. And most of them don't make it, yet they never think of leaving. They stay silhouetted against those they hate, envy, or can never have. I left Ryan and went back into the house and lay down on my bare Beautyrest mattress. I knew I had to call the police. Let them try to capture all the shadows. I reached for my husband's pillow, but it wasn't there. ●

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PASSPORT TO CRIME

THE CALL OF THE LORELEI

by Paul Halter

Translated from the French by Peter Schulman

Beneath a gloomy sky, the white boat full of tourists ploughed through the murky waters of the Rhine. Seated at a table near the railings, Dr. Alan Twist, a tall and thin sexagenarian, staidly dressed in tweed, watched as the old feudal villages passed by one after the other. Still and defiant, their haughty silhouettes were perched along the peaks of hills like sentinels, complementing the twilight beauty of this romantic landscape. Were those old stones hiding the ghostly Walkyries? Were they the keepers of the Rhinegold? The old British detective asked himself these questions as he succumbed to the strange charms of the legendary river.

Suddenly, a murmur rose from the tourists on the bow. Twist followed their gazes and saw a dark and threatening elevated craggy mass emerging like a ghost ship from the mist. The word "Lorelei" buzzed through everyone's lips.

So that was the famous rock. . . . That was where the famous siren would use her enchanting melodies to lure the unsuspecting boatmen towards their rocky deaths.

"Striking, isn't it?" he remarked mechanically to the person sitting next to him. "I don't know why, but I've always been fascinated by these old legends. . . ."

Paul Halter is a native of Alsace-Lorraine and has written over 20 novels, including *La Quatrième Porte (The Fourth Door)*, which won the Cognac Festival Award in 1987, and *Le Brouillard Rouge (The Red Fog)*, which won the French Adventure Novel Prize in 1988. He is a great admirer of John Dickson Carr, and his mystery novels, which often feature an English investigator, Dr. Twist, are often atmospheric and uncanny like Carr's.

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The man ventured an answer only after some time had elapsed and the German tourists had finished singing *"Die Lorelei."*

"Old legend?" he said. "That's how you put it? I can tell you that I knew someone who bloody well saw the siren. . . ."

Dr. Twist turned to look at his interlocutor, a bearded man in his fifties with a somewhat embittered look about him. There was nothing in his demeanor which would suggest that he was joking in any way.

"His name was Hans Georg," he began again, as his eyes looked up towards the deadly rock. "Unfortunately for him, he was unable to resist the call of the Lorelei. . . ."

The detective eventually befriended his companion, one Jean-Marie Vix, who promised to recount the strange tale of Hans Georg one day if Dr. Twist would honor him with a visit to his house in Munchausen, a small village in northern Alsace. Twist, who, coincidentally, was planning to see some friends in nearby Haguenau, took his new friend up on his offer by paying him a visit.

Munchausen hugs the right bank of the Sauer, which, in turn, flows into the Rhine. It is a rather wild region which, despite being subject to flooding by the devastating river, is also home to a picturesque scenery made up of ponds and oxbows over which willows cast their latticelike foliage.

Just north of the village, Jean-Marie Vix's home seemed to erupt from a dreary plain in the midst of a thicket of beeches that surrounded the last few houses. It was an imposing half-timbered two-story house which did not seem to suffer from its isolated location. An ornamental (but slightly askew) border of tiles ran above the first-floor windows. The front door opened onto a large hallway which ran all the way through the rest of the house to the back door; its lime-bleached walls enhanced the reddish patina of the ground-floor windows, as well as the studwork and the polished wood of the doorways. The old house radiated a pleasant warmth that made Dr. Twist feel immediately at home, as did the ebullient welcome from the master of the house, who relieved him of his tweed coat by placing it on the coatrack by the entrance. Without attaching any particular significance to them, Twist noticed, to his left, a few long and beautiful peacock feathers, which had been placed in a terra-cotta vase resting on a low table.

His host apologized for his wife's absence. She was busy with a parishioners' meeting that night but hoped to be forgiven for her absence by having prepared an amazing *choucroute** especially for their guest. Dr. Twist was delighted and rejoiced in the *mirabelle*** which was served to him after the meal. It was at that moment

*A typical Alsatian dish made up of sauerkraut, meat, and vegetables.

**A regional type of plum brandy, often homemade and very strong.

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that Jean-Marie Vix finally began the strange tale of Hans Georg.

"It all happened in the mid nineteen twenties. Hans Georg, a young, blond, athletic German traveling salesman, had an uncomplicated approach to life. He had great confidence in himself, and in humanity in general, as though there were no such thing as evil on this planet. When his work brought him to Munchausen, he wasted no time courting my sister Clementine, even though we had just barely been freed from the German boot. Although about ten years had already elapsed since the armistice had been signed, the Alsace region was still licking her wounds. Alsace had been affected more deeply than any other region in France; she had to pay a heavy price for the conflict. Some of her sons, who had been forcibly conscripted into the Prussian army, had to confront their brothers on the battlefield. . . . Our family, therefore, was hardly overjoyed when Clementine told us that she was planning on getting engaged to Hans Georg, the German. . . . It was thanks only to the wisdom he had acquired with time . . . as well as to a few glasses of *mirabelle* that my father, Panaleon Vix, was able to contain his wrath. My mother simply asked her daughter if she knew what she was doing. I was only thirteen or fourteen years old at the time, and as far as I was concerned, Hans Georg was quite nice, with his direct manner and his resounding laughter. Most importantly, he never forgot to bring me a present when he came over to visit. On the other hand, my brother Hubert, who was just a bit older than Clementine, could barely suppress his rancor. He cooled down eventually, at least sufficiently enough to suffer through the German's company, but he never failed to mock our neighbors on the other side of the Rhine, and that is exactly what he did on the day when Hans Georg, who was always filled with a boundless initiative, took us all on a cruise along the Rhine.

"As we approached the Lorelei's rock, Hans Georg brought up the old romantic legend. Hubert then proceeded to declare drily that the story had been fabricated to explain why so many fatal crashes had occurred at that particularly dangerous spot. Hans simply shrugged his shoulders and laughed, admitting that, after all, such a thing was quite possible. Yet, a few minutes later, when the rock became more perceptible, he became quite tense and his face appeared visibly confused. Only on the way back did he admit to having seen a young blond woman at the top of the promontory. We all dismissed it as a mere coincidence. A few weeks later, however, he thought he had seen the young woman again several times in a row. In town, in the crowds, at a detour on a country road . . . he had seen her signaling to him discreetly. He turned right around each time he saw her, despite his hesitations. He felt an intense attraction to the young blonde's charms, but his instincts urged him to be cautious.

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"Clementine, however, was convinced that these sightings were proof that a rival existed, a rival who hoped to snatch her fiancé away from her by some sort of cryptic trickery. Hans Georg was not spared a few jealous scenes. She eventually began to agree with her mother, who was very superstitious, and saw the uncanny female apparitions as a bad omen. As for my brother and father, they seemed rather sceptical at that point. Then winter came. . . .

"It was around mid December, when we were celebrating Clementine and Hans's engagement right here in this house. It was bitterly cold at that time. Munchausen and its surrounding towns shivered beneath heavy layers of snow. But our home was blessed with a deliciously warm ambiance. There were about twenty of us in attendance: our family, some friends, my bachelor uncle Joseph who had limped ever since he had been wounded in the trenches by a shell explosion. He was a jolly chap who was unmatched when it came time to enliven an evening with his accordion. For Hans, the vision of the young woman had become but a distant memory: He no longer made the slightest mention of it. But the moment Uncle Joseph launched into a rendition of the 'Lorelei,' an icy frost seemed to envelop the dining room. . . . My parents and the affianced couple suddenly became pale. There was something incongruous about their frozen countenances and the accordionist's lilting melody. Without probing or attempting to understand what was going on, Uncle Joseph quickly switched to a more engaging tune. It was a minor incident that the others had hardly noticed, but Hans began to show signs of great concern. He continued to act as jovially as possible, but was caught occasionally shooting quick and furtive glances at the windows.

"By midnight, all the guests had gone home with the exception of Hans. It was still snowing, but not a single snowflake was falling an hour later when the fiancé finally took his leave. He had kept my father company in the kitchen for one last drink, while my mother, my brother, my sister, and myself had gone to bed. When the clock struck one, he finally left the house. It must have taken him two attempts, however, as the first time he tried he had to come back for his umbrella, which he had forgotten to take with him. According to my father, he was a little tipsy but not drunk. He usually spoke quite loudly, and we all heard his thunderous: *'Ach! Donnerwetter! Ich habe mein parapli vergessen!'* A few minutes later, the door slammed a second time. He had opened his umbrella even though it was no longer snowing. My mother was the one who followed his strange behavior from the first-floor bedroom. The heavy snow clouds lifted, and the veiled moon seemed to bathe the landscape in a cadaverous hue. Hans had barely advanced a few meters in the direction of the village. He turned

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around and appeared to extend his ear. He then went back on his steps, tentatively. . . . Each time he returned, he wanted to go back out towards the village but he seemed to be attracted by something mysterious coming from the north. . . . Had he stumbled upon the famous siren's song? My mother asserted that she did not hear anything in particular at that moment, neither a song nor a cry, but she was half asleep, and couldn't say for sure. She had been awakened from her slumber by the German's door-slamming, and his shouting. Thus, she had seen Hans circle the house from the left side and waited in vain for him to reappear, but then went back to bed because sleep had overtaken her. Hans was found the next morning drowned in the frozen little pond, about a hundred meters north of the house, and not far from the Rhine. . . . The malevolent siren had succeeded in drawing him into her lethal trap!

"The police officer from the *gendarmerie,* who was dispatched to the scene that very afternoon, undertook an extremely detailed investigation. As it had not snowed since the previous evening, he was able to retrace the victim's path with ease. Hans Georg had indeed followed the contours of the house, working his way along the entire left side of it before making his way to the back door. His steps were not entirely clear because he had been so visibly hesitant, advancing and then retreating. Moreover, the layer of snow was not thick, as the roof had sheltered the edges of the house. Curiously, when Hans veered decisively northward, the steps became quite distinctive. Even though the steps seemed uncertain after an evening of heavy drinking, the footprints here evidenced a rather heavy gait. Hans had headed straight towards the pond, the frozen surface of which had disappeared beneath a pristine layer of snow. He did, however, know it was there. He knew that it was a dangerous place to tread, and yet, this had not been enough to stop him from making his way to the center of the pond, where the ice collapsed beneath his feet. It reconstituted itself during the night above the unfortunate fellow's corpse, which cast a vague shadow from the depths of the icy water. As for his umbrella, it remained on the ice's surface, right next to the fatal jaws of the opening he had fallen through. Because the water temperature had been particularly cold that night, he must have died rather quickly.

"But what would have propelled Hans Georg towards such a dangerous spot? What had he heard right after leaving the house? The officer from the *gendarmerie* was asking himself that very question, especially after learning of the existence of the enigmatic blonde, who, it turns out, had only been seen by the victim himself. Did she actually exist? He firmly rejected the 'diabolical siren' theory which my mother and sister seemed to completely

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believe. And yet, Hans's death was shrouded in mystery. The suicide hypothesis did not hold up, given the victim's personality. Hans Georg had apparently no reason to put an end to his days, especially on the eve of his engagement. An accident? That, too, was unlikely, so bizarre had been his behavior that night. The investigator never brought up the possibility of some criminal mischief, but it surely must have crossed his mind at some point or another. Nonetheless, it was established that no one could have approached the victim on the path he took after leaving the house, either to push him from behind or otherwise make him fall through the ice. The distinctive and isolated footprints Hans left behind proved at least that much. Nor could anyone have walked in his footsteps, tracing them back to the shore, or performing any other perilous act of that nature. Furthermore, the space around the house and the pond were perfectly untrammeled as well. The trees which bordered the north bank of the river were too far from the spot where the ice had cracked to imagine the possible involvement of a tightrope walker or any other kind of acrobatic trick. The theory that the victim's death had been caused by his own momentary alcoholic frenzy was the one that was ultimately accepted, but I can assure you, Mr. Twist, that from my family's and my point of view, there is another explanation for Hans Georg's tragic death."

"What you're saying, then, if I understand you correctly," Dr. Twist playfully suggested, "is that you believe the siren may have played a role in all of this?"

His interlocutor seemed embarrassed. He stroked his reddish beard before sighing. "Yes, since there is no other conclusion that I find satisfactory. . . ."

With these words, he took the bottle of *mirabelle,* filled the glasses, then added: "But something seems to tell me you are not entirely convinced of this, Mr. Twist. . . ."

"Well, let's say that my experiences with criminal affairs have taught me to be somewhat sceptical. . . . But before giving you my opinion, I would like to ask you a few questions. . . . Do you remember any kind of detail that might stick out, any kind of innocuous event that might have occurred then?"

"No, not really," Vix answered, making a concerted effort to think long and hard about it. "Nothing except for the peacock feather, which intrigued the officer, but I don't think that it could be of any importance. . . ."

"A peacock feather?" asked the astonished visitor. "Similar to the ones I noticed in the hallway, near the front door?"

"Yes. The day after the dramatic event, we found one on the floor, at the far end of the hallway. My mother had the silly idea of alerting the officer to this fact, as neither she nor anyone else

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could explain its presence there."

"How peculiar. . . . Besides that, was there anything else?"

"No, not that I can remember. . . ."

"Did Hans Georg speak German with you?"

"Yes, of course," Jean-Marie Vix answered, feebly attempting a smile. "He knew a bit of French, but began with the premise that we were all expected to be completely versed in his native language. . . ."

"And what about the Alsatian dialect?"

"No, not even that. . . . Nothing but German. . . ."

"That's just what I thought," Twist answered, nodding. "But then there is something strange about your narrative. . . . Are you quite sure of the words he used that night when he came back to get his umbrella? *'Ach! Donnerwetter! Ich habe mein parapli vergessen!'*"

"Yes, absolutely, since everybody heard it. . . . (The master of the house's face lit up at that point.) Ah! I see. It's the *'parapli'* that bothers you! Believe me, that would not be the case if you knew how to speak the dialect. Alsatians use the French word for umbrella. That's what threw you off in your reasoning. . . ."

"I'm rather afraid that the opposite has occurred, in the sense that none of you noticed this anomaly because you were all used to the dialect. Think about it for a moment: Hans Georg should have used *Regenschirm,* the German term, in fact . . . and yet he did no such thing!"

The master of the house seemed surprised.

"Yes, you're right . . . but there could be a million reasons why he didn't. . . . (He scratched the back of his head.) Let's see . . . First of all, because he had a drop too much to drink that night . . . but is this really important?"

"I fear that it is indeed. . . . It could mean, for example, that someone else uttered those words. . . ."

"But that's absurd! And who on earth could that have been if that were the case?"

"To that we can add the detail of the peacock feather," Twist continued as though he hadn't heard that last remark. "No, really, none of this leads me to believe for a minute that . . . Unfortunately, I have too much experience in criminal matters to believe that this Lorelei had anything to do with it. . . ."

The Alsatian frowned: "What? Are you implying that Hans Georg was . . . *murdered?*"

"That is a term that cannot be disregarded, alas!"

"But then, we would have to look for his killer . . . here, amongst ourselves!"

Twist downed his glass of *mirabelle* in one shot before asking: "By the way, whatever happened to your family?"

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"Sadly, there are not a lot of us still around! Time took its toll and then the Second World War came rumbling through. . . . My brother was shot by the Germans as a spy shortly after the liberation. My parents died soon afterwards, as well as Uncle Joseph. Clementine, who had taken refuge in the Perigord* region during the upheaval, simply stayed there. She recently married a childhood friend who moved to her village. Unfortunately, we rarely see each other. . . . No, really, I find it difficult to believe that one of them could have committed such an act. . . ."

"Are you quite certain of that, monsieur? It has become quite apparent from your narrative that few of you approved of your sister's choice. Moreover, as it turns out, I am rather familiar with the historical context of the period. World War One and France's defeat at the hands of the Prussians left a large number of Alsatians with intensely hostile feelings towards the invaders. Hans's nationality made him an intruder, a vile stain on your family's honor. It was only because of his irreproachable behavior that everyone was able to calm down. But it did not take much to reawaken this ancestral hatred. As a matter of fact, you are all suspects! With the exception of your sister, because she was in love with him. . . ."

Jean-Marie Vix emptied his glass with a gulp and asserted: "Hans Georg could not have been murdered, Mr. Twist, the investigation officially proved it."

"Wouldn't a crafty soul have been able to skillfully lure him to the pond?"

"By imitating the siren's voice?" Vix shot back with an acerbic grin. "I admit to having thought of that possibility myself at that time . . . but there are two elements which weaken that particular argument. Nobody in the house heard any such call, and allow me to remind you that there were no other footprints besides Hans's throughout the entire circumference of the lake. . . . So I don't see how anyone, by virtue of their magical cries, could have convinced this victim to march towards the lake by his own volition as though he were some sort of zombie mesmerized by the sheer artifice of a song. . . ."

A tinge of malice flashed through the detective's eyes: "You are forgetting his hesitations after his departure. Your mother did indeed see him return several times before going around the house. . . ."

"Precisely, there can be no explanation for that! Which proves without a doubt that we are dealing with a supernatural creature. . . ."

Twist shook his head gravely: "No, there *can* be a perfectly rational explanation . . . an explanation that solves the entire mystery, the mystery of the *'parapli'* as well as the peacock feather."

*A region in the southwest of France.

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Silence once again fell on the room while Vix hung onto the detective's every word.

"Obviously, my idea is just a hypothesis, but it has the merit of dissipating all the incoherent aspects of your story. First of all, I think Hans Georg was poking fun at you from the start with all that Lorelei business. During your cruise along the Rhine, his ego was probably wounded by your brother's remark, as though the entire German nation had been targeted directly. He therefore came to the defense of the legend and, in order to convince you that the siren really existed (for fun as much as out of spite), he claimed to have seen her at the top of the rock. The worried looks from your mother and your sister encouraged him to continue his little game. It was a hoax that your father eventually uncovered, with the assistance of Hans Georg himself, no doubt, who had in all likelihood confessed to it that night, or perhaps even had bragged about it while they were having one last drink together. . . . Your father, whose temper had undoubtedly also been fueled by alcohol, would have wanted to get even . . . and by the same token, he must have told himself that his family's honor and his daughter's well-being were now in his hands. . . . *So Hans Georg claimed to have seen the Lorelei? Well then, it would make sense for him to join her!* he must have told himself.

"At around one in the morning, when the young man had left the house, he got into a coat resembling the one the German was wearing, took an umbrella similar to the one he was carrying, then, in German, cried out the sentence in question in order to attract attention and to lead everyone to believe that Hans had returned, but he had also made the mistake I have alerted you to. He then proceeded to go out and perform the pantomime that your mother followed from her bedroom window. The opened umbrella made it quite difficult to recognize him. He went around the house but for him there was no problem using the back door upon his return. His hesitant footsteps and his comings and goings were doubly judicious as they scrambled the footsteps to the point where they could not be determined to be someone's other than Hans's, which were very distinctive, and which in fact began from the back of the house. . . ."

"I don't understand. . . . What was the point of that particular maneuver?"

"To lead people to believe that Hans had just heard the siren's call and that he hadn't exited through the rear of the house directly, because that would have seemed too odd. . . ."

"But how was he able to lure Hans Georg towards the lake?" Jean-Marie Vix interjected, his eyes round as saucers.

"This is when the peacock feather comes into play. Earlier, when I walked through the hallway, I noticed that what made it remark-

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able was its extreme uniformity—the red checkered floor, the equal number of wooden doors at each side, as well as one on each end leading outdoors. A person who was not aware of this, or who was simply disoriented when exiting through the rear door (which opened up to a vast blanket of snow with a clump of trees at the end of it), could well imagine that he was going towards the village, as the scenery is pretty much the same in either direction—especially at night or when one's thinking is clouded by alcohol. The 'last drink' your father served now becomes crucially important. It allowed him to be more efficient in his abuse of this person he wanted to drive away from his family. In order to accomplish this, he took advantage of a strategy which, despite its incredible simplicity, was quite ingenious and should not have taken him more than one or two minutes to execute. After making some vague excuse, he went out into the hallway and simply moved the coatrack and the low table with its conspicuous peacock feathers and placed them both by the back door. . . . The feather fell without his noticing it when, a little later, he put everything back in its place. You can guess the rest of the story: The unfortunate Hans Georg marched towards his fate with great confidence . . . and joined the rest of the Lorelei's victims all the way down to the bottom of their watery graves." ●

Translator's Note: *It is not unusual for furnishings such as those that play a part in this mystery to remain the same for generations in a French home that is passed down within a family.*

EQMM Goes to the Movies (continued from page 3)

Koepp to fulfill the universal need of thriller viewers to feel the hairs on their heads stand at attention.

Though King's story places Mort Rainey in his fifties, Johnny Depp's youthful, pretty-boy looks have been roughened up sufficiently to make him a credible stand-in for the best-selling author, and Depp comes through with a well-gauged portrayal of the character's increasingly skewed perspective. Rainey is undergoing a tormenting divorce from Amy, portrayed attractively and with plausible ambivalence—she has feelings for her husband, but can't live with him—by Maria Bello. Her lover, Ted Milner, firmly characterized by Timothy Hutton, actually seems to care for the female half of the home he has "wrecked." John Turturro's blank-eyed self-control in the role of Shooter is calmly, yet harrowingly intimidating. Another critical member of the ensemble has no spoken lines whatsoever, but is nevertheless a fundamental presence throughout the unfolding mystery: the legendary *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. A single missing copy of the digest periodical serves as a fulcrum for the rising dread from beginning to end.

After a brief prelude in which Mort Rainey discovers his wife's

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betrayal, the movie opens on the writer living alone with his pain, save for the dubious company of a mild-mannered dog, in a second home at Tashmore Lake in upstate New York. From out of the bowels of Mississippi appears a tall, gaunt, silhouetted figure wearing a black broad-brimmed hat with a round crown, looking rather like a state trooper whose avocation is violence. He raps on Rainey's door, then introduces himself as John Shooter (later: "Maybe my name's not Shooter") and claims that a story he calls "Sowing Season," which appeared under the title "Secret Window" in a book published by Rainey in 1997, was actually written by himself in 1994. Judging the intruder to be one of those "crazy folks" one runs into in the abnormal course of a writer's life, Rainey counters that the story had first appeared under his own byline in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* in 1993. That should've cleared up any misunderstanding, right? Not in the updraft of King's mind.

Shooter is aggressively unconvinced and demands to see the proof—in print. Latching onto the issue of *EQMM* in which Rainey claims the story appeared becomes a kind of "car chase" without a car in pursuit. Though Rainey's topsy-turvy mind had already conjured up unpleasant scenarios that might arise out of his confrontation with Shooter, he only begins to take the stranger's threats seriously when he awakes from a nap to find Shooter has affixed something ghoulish to his garbage-bin cover by the fiendish means of a screwdriver. Then the sprawling suburban house which was taken over by his wife after their separation, and where Rainey had kept files of his past publications, comes under attack. Simmering with paranoia, Rainey convinces himself that the house, located hours away, has been targeted by Shooter for the sole purpose of destroying the evidence—the magazine!

With Rainey's psyche badly fractured by the loss of his wife and home, and with Shooter locking in a deadline of three days for him to come up with the magazine—and Shooter does mean deadline—we are led through the winding tunnels of Rainey's fears ("You scare too easy," the stiff-necked yokel declares) and Shooter's expanding hostility ("I will burn your life and every person in it like a cane field in a high wind").

Fortunately, the film grants us a breather from this madness in the person of a level-headed, if hard-nosed, investigator whose determination to find the truth and to earn a good buck in the process is conveyed with touches of humor by Charles S. Dutton. The problem is that the investigator's suspicion of what's going on —that the lover of his client's ex-wife may have hired Shooter to frighten the writer away—intensifies Rainey's distress and propels them all toward a shocking ending. An ending that is, as Rainey informs the town sheriff, "the most important part of the story."

The script gives way to the genre's verbal cliches at points, such as when Rainey tells the investigator he'd like to know what he's dealing

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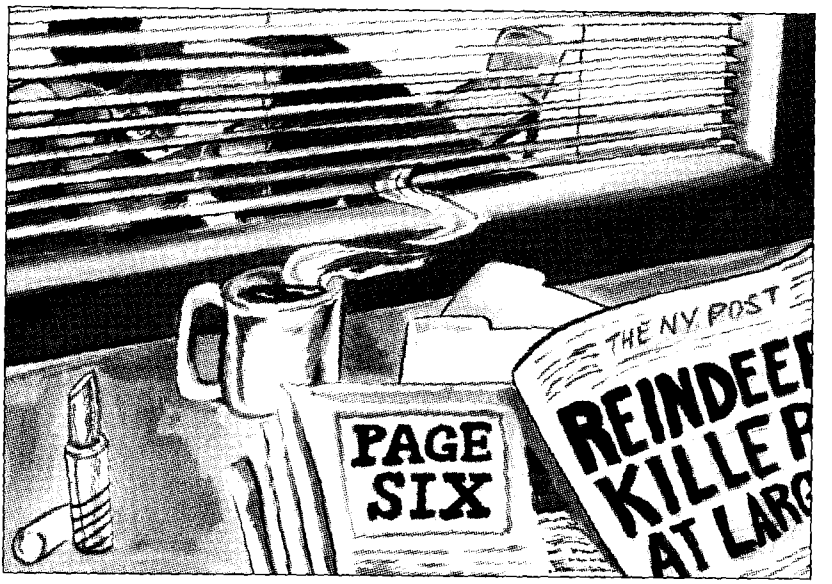

Art by June Levine

Farber and the Reindeer Killer

by Gordon Cotler

The first words out of Sylvie Farber's mouth were, "A serial killer? Is Beckerhof on the case?"

"No, thank God," Farber said. He had just been named to head up the small task force. "That's one headache less. But only one."

It never failed, Farber knew. As soon as the media reported the Department's belief that two or more murders "may have been committed by the same person," the serial-killer buffs, police groupies, and clue junkies wriggled out of the woodwork. While these amateur sleuths phoned in their can't-miss advice on how to nab the killer, the little old ladies would propel their eighty-five pounds down to the precinct house to demand round-the-clock police protection. Soon thereafter psychics of every persuasion would begin sharing with the media the evidence that had come to

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them in a trance, in a dream, or in the shower: The killer was from suburban Hoboken, the killer had hypertension and a failing liver, the killer would strike again on Thursday. (This last would galvanize the L.O.L.s into ramming their steamer trunks up against their apartment doors and in some cases sitting on them.)

All of this was to be expected and could be dealt with professionally. What bugged Farber, what made him grind his teeth in his sleep, was the Beckerhof factor. At the first hint of a serial killing, Lester Beckerhof's name would spring to the lips of the Department brass. Ever since the M104 case six years ago Beckerhof had been the unofficial but universally acknowledged Department serial-killer profiler. He would surely have been given this current case—the so-called Reindeer Murders—if he wasn't locked onto a federal–local task force in Brooklyn. But if Farber didn't close Reindeer fast, you could bet the ranch there would be cries from One Police Plaza to, for God's sake, yank Beckerhof out of Brooklyn and get him onto this damn thing.

Farber hadn't been a fan of Beckerhof even before the M104 murders. He had been turned off by the sneer of superiority etched on the man's fleshy face, and his habit of rearing his head back as though retreating from a foul smell. But the M104 killings had heightened Bernie's distaste to outright contempt. And the years since had failed to soften that assessment.

As luck would have it, the first three rape-murders that eventually came to be known as the M104 killings occurred while the Farbers were on their annual vacation in the Adirondacks with their daughters, then in their early teens. Within a three-week period three young women who lived on or near Broadway on the Upper West Side were attacked in or close to their homes between nine and ten in the evening. Beckerhof, who ranked Farber by a couple of years, was the lead detective on the case and had gotten nowhere with it by the time the Farbers came back to town.

Beckerhof's single creative move had been to place undercover cops on the Broadway subway, on the theory that the women had been targeted by a regular late-night user of the line who then followed them home. That theory exploded when a fourth victim

In the course of his career, Gordon Cotler has worked as both a screenwriter (most notably on the movies *Sanctuary of Fear* and *Arabesque*) and as a novelist and short story writer whose work has been adapted for film. In 1962, his novel *The Bottletop Affair* was made into the movie *The Horizontal Lieutenant* starring Jim Hutton, who later played Ellery Queen on TV. Lately, Mr. Cotler has been devoting his time to the Farber stories published in *EQMM*. †

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(same grisly M.O.) turned up on East 42nd Street, half a mile from the Broadway line. And there the case stalled for two more weeks.

Farber stumbled onto a possible solution at breakfast one morning during the half-second it took his bagel to travel from the plate to his mouth. It remained suspended an inch from its destination while Farber said, without preamble, "Forget the subway, what about the bus?"

Sylvie, across the kitchen table, looked up from her coffee and the Metro section of the paper. "Excuse me?" she said.

"That string of rape-murders. The M104 bus crawls down Broadway until it hits Forty-second Street, *then it turns ninety degrees and travels due east.* How about if the killer is an M104 bus regular? It's worth a shot."

Sylvie said, "Didn't you tell me this was Lester Beckerhof's case?"

"So?"

"Keep your nose out of it."

But he didn't. Farber sought out Beckerhof that same morning and expounded his theory while the task-force chief shuffled papers at his desk. Beckerhof never looked up and his total response was, "Did I miss something while I was in the can, Farber? Did somebody downtown put you on this team?" After which he swiveled in his chair and shouted, "God damn it, Brophy, do we or do we not have a report from Menendez?" Translation: *Buzz off, Farber, I've got work to do.*

In light of that dismissal Farber was surprised to learn from his own contacts on the task force that Beckerhof had later the same day assigned half a dozen men to ride the M104 from nine to eleven in the evening. And six days later, the killer was caught *in flagrante* when he followed a woman from the bus to her apartment in the West Sixties. The perp had been trailed from the M104 by a detective on Beckerhof's team.

At his medal ceremony Beckerhof told the admiring media, "Please, guys, don't embarrass me, this was a no-brainer. I should have staked out that bus from day one. It took me way too long to analyze the killer's M.O."

It was right about then that Sylvie Farber learned never to mention Beckerhof's name to her husband near bedtime, as it only led to nocturnal teeth-grinding.

The current case was so far only two corpses old, but it had the earmarks of a dedicated serial murderer. There was no question that the two deaths, ten days apart, were by the same hand; the killer had gone out of his way to make that clear. And according to the Department psychologist, the anger or madness—whatever motivated the perp—was likely to build to a flash point again in about the same period of time or less.

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The killer's signature offered the tabloids an easy label. Within hours of the discovery of the second body (even before Farber was named to head the task force) he was already The Reindeer Killer. A generous gob of lipstick—"Follow Me," manufactured by a small New Jersey firm, according to the crime-lab analyst—had been applied in equal measure to both victims. Not to their lips, which would have been odd enough, since both were men, but to the tips of their noses. It was the one clue linking the cases, and it came soon enough after Christmas so that "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" must still have been reverberating in the skulls of the headline writers.

Farber got home to a late supper the day he was appointed to head up the small Reindeer task force, somewhat the worse for wear after submitting to a barrage of media questions. His constantly repeated, "Give me a break, I got the case an hour ago," and variations thereof, was given no respite by his wife, who bowed to no one in the insatiable-curiosity department. Once Sylvie assured herself that there was no Beckerhof element in the equation she settled in with her own questions. While Bernie choked down a sandwich and a cup of coffee, he was obliged to lay out the facts thus far.

"The first victim barely made the papers," he began through a mouthful of tuna. "A middle-aged wino heavily asleep on a park bench after a massive intake of alcohol. A plastic bag had been slipped over his head. That kind of suffocation death is not exactly a man-bites-dog story."

"Even when the corpse has a lipsticked nose?" Sylvie demanded.

"As an isolated incident, it didn't resonate. The lipstick could have signified anything—maybe some kind of clowning around by the drunk before he fell asleep. It was only when the second body was found yesterday with the same nose markings that alarm bells went off. Especially since the second victim was not a throwaway but a solid citizen, a taxpayer. Not only did we have a certified serial killer on our hands, he wasn't a killer with a messianic 'Let's get rid of the homeless' complex. It looked like *anybody* could be a victim of this nut."

"So where did the second body turn up?"

"In his office in a West Thirties loft building. Arthur Hellman, a dress manufacturer."

"Don't tell me his head was in a plastic bag."

"No. The upscale victim got an upscale murder. Only the lipstick was the same. The guy was poisoned."

"How?"

"He had a drink with someone. Johnnie Walker Black from the office liquor cabinet. Both glasses were empty, but only his contained traces of the poison, a particularly virulent form of arsenic. The M.E. says it didn't take him long to die. Alone in his office, after

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hours. Not pretty. And yes, the desk, the visitor's chair, his glass, every place he knew he had touched, was wiped clean of prints."

"And nobody in the office could describe the visitor?"

"They'd all gone home. Hellman told his secretary he was waiting for a new customer, someone he'd never met. According to the secretary—by the way, she'd been with him twelve years—it was not unusual for the boss to receive out-of-town buyers for a drink before dinner, the theater, or—who knows?—an evening with some agreeable ladies. The office is designed to knock your socks off. Mahogany paneling, designer lighting, drop-dead furniture. Not a bad place to die."

Sylvie was mesmerized. "A wino and a businessman," she whispered. "Who's next? And when?"

Bernie shrugged. There was not much to grab on to so far. Would they have to wait for another victim before a pattern showed itself?

He was coming out of the shower the following morning when Sylvie came into the bathroom wearing a what-did-I-tell-you look. She thrust the paper at him, folded back to page six of the Metro section.

"Could you at least wait till I'm dry?" he said. "I'm not ready for bad news."

"I'll read it to you," she said. "It's down near the bottom of the piece, way past Lieutenant Bernard Farber's 'Give me a break, I just got the case an hour ago.'"

She read, "'Reached by phone in Brooklyn, where he is on special assignment, Lieutenant Lester Beckerhof, a leading NYPD serial-killing profiler, offered this comment: "I never second-guess cases I'm not on. The officer in charge of this one knows as well as I do that a red nose is shorthand for a drunk. This killer may very well be targeting alcoholics in revenge for the vehicular homicide of his wife or child by a drunk he can't attack because that particular drunk was killed in the same accident. It's an easy theory to check, and I'm confident Lieutenant Farber is going at it full out."' How about that, Bernie?"

Bernie was toweling himself angrily. "Lieutenant Farber had no comment," he said. "Not until he was totally dry."

And, he decided, not even then.

Dolly Pinto, the unit's stone-faced civil-service clerk, greeted him with, "Chief Quigley called. Less than three minutes ago."

"No kidding?" Farber muttered as he punched up the number. "What could that be about?" And then, "It's Farber, Chief."

"Yes, Bernie," said Quigley. "Les Beckerhof checked in last night." Uh-huh. "He's on detached duty in Brooklyn, you know." Quigley was easing into this like a ferry boat at its slip. "Not to crowd you, but Les has had a few good takes in the past on these

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serial situations and—"

"I spotted Beckerhof's take on this situation in the paper this morning, Chief. It was next to a swimsuit ad that caught my eye." The barb would go right by Quigley. "He said, look for somebody out to kill drunks, right?"

"That's about the gist of it, and I thought—"

"The body in the park fits that profile," Farber rolled on. "But how about the second victim? According to the secretary who was with him twelve years, the garment maker only drank with customers and never more than one. In New York that qualifies him as a teetotaler."

A moment of crackling silence on the line and then, "I see. Of course, Beckerhof didn't know that, did he? He took a shot in the dark and not a bad one. Don't sell him short, Bernie. His input can be valuable. If he has any more ideas—"

"Have him send them to me directly. My subscription to the *Times* is running out."

He had finally gotten through. "Easy does it, Bernie. We're all in this together. And it's likely to get worse. This type of killer doesn't stop at two."

"I'm aware of that, Chief."

"The media will be at our throats. Make sure you give them something every day. Even if it's the weather."

Bernie had simmered down. "Right, Chief."

When he hung up, Dolly murmured, "Temper, temper."

But Farber wasn't listening. He could feel Beckerhof's hot breath on the back of his neck.

His first order of business was to look for a thread that connected the two victims, and his team quickly established that there was just about none; these two men inhabited different universes. It was true that both grew up in the Bronx, but so did millions of other New Yorkers. Hellman rose from his beginnings, Cutter sank like a stone. The nearest that could be found to a connection—a mighty stretch—was that both had gone to Taft High School. Hellman was a freshman when Cutter was a senior and a meticulous round of interviews with classmates of both and teachers (mostly retired) showed that as far as anyone could tell the two had never exchanged so much as a word. Why would they have? They lived more than a mile apart and shared no interest in a sport or hobby. Hellman was a straight-A student while Cutter graduated by the skin of his teeth after being suspended twice for disruptive behavior.

A dead end.

"So what do you do next?" Sylvie asked at breakfast the morning her husband admitted they were still on square one.

"Check the likelihood that we've got a leaf-in-the-forest case."

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To his wife's blank stare over the rim of her coffee cup he said, "It's a favorite of mystery writers, and like most overheated theories almost never comes up in the real world. But it's a possible fit for this case and I've got to at least look into it."

"Bernie, you're still not telling me what it is. 'Falling Leaves'? The song?"

"Not a song, a murder scam. The way it works is this: A perp wants to kill Victim A. His motive is so strong—he is, say, the sole beneficiary of a large insurance policy—that he would immediately be the prime suspect in the murder. So he diffuses suspicion by killing three or four people seemingly at random—leaves in the forest—Victim A being the second or third. The police are led to search for a motive that links all the deaths, or for no motive at all beyond a senseless murder rampage."

"Disgusting. Worse, diabolical. What makes you think this might be a leaf-in-the-forest case?"

"A single clue. This perpetrator went to some trouble to make sure we knew the murders were by a single hand. The M.O. in the second case was so different from the first that without the lipstick that linked the two the Department would never have tagged them as serial murders. If this is a 'Leaf' case, we're up against a truly dedicated son of a bitch." He got to his feet without finishing his coffee, possibly a first for Farber. "You said it, Syl, and so would Sherlock Holmes. Diabolical."

Detectives Brot and Mancuso reported to Farber in less than a day on the brief, sad post-graduate history of John Cutter, victim number one. Fifty years old, he had been diagnosed as borderline schizophrenic when he was twenty. In and out of institutions for the next many years, he had lived mostly on the streets for the past ten, more or less steadied by psychotropic drugs that he took with no degree of regularity. No living family, no possibility of an inheritance, and no sworn enemies, according to his buddies among the homeless, who pronounced him quick-tempered but harmless. No reason for anyone to want him dead, Brot summed up, other than sheer generalized orneriness. Farber hadn't expected anything more. The first victim in a leaf-in-the-forest murder spree is not likely to be the murderer's real target.

Farber, meanwhile, had pursued the more promising Arthur Hellman thread. The facts were straightforward. Hellman House was essentially a one-man operation. Hellman designed the popular-priced line of casual wear and sold it himself. Manufacturing was contracted out to the lowest bidder, usually in a southern state or offshore. Everyone in the small New York office was a support person. In short, without Arthur Hellman there would be no Hellman House.

Mrs. Hellman—Diane—had returned from her husband's

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funeral a couple of hours before Farber called on her at her Fifth Avenue apartment and offered his condolences. They sat in the generous living room on chairs upholstered in a raw silk that picked up the pale blue of the widow's tear-filled eyes. Her blond hair and heart-shaped face were well served by an expensive haircut. Her midnight-blue suit was good, her shoes very good, her manicure excellent. She was used to the good things in life, had probably been born to them.

No, she knew of no enemies her husband might have, and no, she could point to nothing that would lead her to believe someone wanted him dead. After a few more pro forma questions he came out with the one he had been waiting to ask.

"Mrs. Hellman, did your husband leave you well protected? Would you know if he carried adequate insurance on his life?"

The tiny woman, ninety pounds of pampered frailty, drew herself erect. "Yes, he did. Quite a sufficiency," she said. "Arthur was a most caring husband and father, thank God. We have three children under the age of sixteen. We are the sole beneficiaries."

Her voice was matter-of-fact. She was determined not to display her grief to this stranger, but some things she couldn't hide. The suddenness of the tragedy had hit her like a truck. Those puffy eyes, a lip that trembled despite her brave effort to control it, and stray hairs that defied the masterful haircut all spoke of her desolation.

Farber stayed on track. "A sufficiency. Any idea exactly how much that comes to?"

"It's through the company. I think it's called a key-employee policy." She thrust her well-shaped chin forward. "Arthur told me I would never have to worry. It's for two million dollars."

The best Farber could manage was, "At this unhappy time, that must be at least some small comfort."

"It helps," whispered Mrs. Hellman. "We'll get by. Although"—she swept a hand around the room—"not here."

Children were clamoring from another room for her attention and Farber bowed himself out. His last words were, "If you remember something I ought to know, you have my card."

At the elevator he thought, Okay, here is someone with a motive for murder. But if in fact that wisp of a widow had arranged to have her husband killed—not to mention the victim in the park—Farber would eat his shield.

"I see that Lester Beckerhof has made the papers again," said Sylvie over breakfast nearly a week later. Neither the *Times* nor her husband had satisfied her curiosity on this story and she was having the *Post* delivered.

"Where? What?" said Farber, slamming his coffee cup down hard enough to rattle his bowl of shredded wheat. "Let me have that."

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He reached across the kitchen table, but Sylvie held the tabloid out of his reach. "I'll summarize it for you," she said. "No point in working yourself into an ulcer."

Farber muttered something she took to be acquiescence and she said, "That federal case in Brooklyn? It's winding down. The defendants suddenly copped a plea and the task force is being disbanded." She read, " 'Asked if his next assignment would be lead detective on the so-called Reindeer murder case, Lieutenant Lester Beckerhof, the Department's crack profiler of serial killings, said, "That's not my call. Anyway, the officer heading up that case must be making progress or he'd be off it by now, right? Checking drunk-driving accident reports and interviewing possibly vengeful relatives of the victims is a slow process." ' " She looked up. "No kidding, is that what you're doing?"

"No, I am not," Farber said without unclenching his teeth.

"I *thought* you had squelched that theory of Beckerhof's when it turned out the second victim was not a drinker."

"Beckerhof bent the chief's ear again." Farber did his really poor imitation of the Beckerhof drawl. " 'How do we know that Hellman wasn't a *secret* drinker?' "

"Well, how do we?"

"We don't. I told Quigley if he gave me the staffing I'd go on a massive hunt for a drunk-basher. I'd fine-tooth-comb DMV records. At the moment I don't have the manpower for that."

"So, all things considered, how's it going?"

"Could be better." What he needed was another murder, but he kept himself from saying so by stuffing his mouth with shredded wheat.

Not thirty minutes later, Dolly Pinto grabbed his arm as he reached the top of the stairs on his way to his office. "Will you look at this?" she said and pulled him around to face the small-screen office television set. It was tuned to an all-news cable channel and the eager young reporter was speaking from outside the Kerry Grill, a saloon in what looked like Queens.

" . . . It is the long-expected third in this series of killings. The body was discovered half an hour ago when this popular bar-and-grill opened. Its owner, Casey Flynn, was apparently shot at close range last night as he was closing up."

The picture widened to include a florid-faced man of about fifty with thinning hair, who was clearly distraught. The reporter said, "I am here with Joseph Flynn, the day manager and the dead man's brother. So let me ask you, sir, how did it feel to unlock the door behind me and discover—"

"How do you think it felt?" the man spat back. His voice betrayed his Irish roots. "That was my brother dead on the floor

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with lipstick smeared on his nose. He'd come through every kind of hell in Northern Ireland, and then this . . . this . . . "

Farber's phone was ringing and he ducked into his office to pick it up. No surprise, it was Chief Quigley, who spoke without preamble. "Bernie, you asked for help, I'm giving you help. I'm putting Les Beckerhof on this thing. I'm not taking you off, you understand, but Les has seniority, so you'll be reporting to him."

"Chief, would you first give me a chance to—"

"No. A dead bartender. *A dead bartender.* Did Beckerhof have to tell me? This perp is not only killing drunks, he's killing people who *encourage* drunks. He's killing the—what do you call 'em?—the enablers."

Within the hour Beckerhof had the team rechanneled to combing Department of Motor Vehicles records and Nexis stories on drunk-driving accidents. Farber he dispatched to Queens with a dismissive nod, to look into the murder of the owner of the Kerry Grill.

For the next two days, try as she would, Sylvie could not get a word out of her husband about the Reindeer case. He was barely home, and when he was he wore the distracted look of a man who can't remember where he left his wallet.

But on the third evening, as soon as she unlocked her front door, she knew that all was well again. An up-tempo Latin beat pulsated from the living-room radio and from the kitchen came the cheery sound of ice tumbling into the Farbers' martini pitcher. Sylvie made directly for the kitchen. Her husband's face as he poured the gin confirmed her diagnosis.

"You've caught the Reindeer killer," she prompted.

"Well . . . " He took a beat, then continued cautiously while he added vermouth, "Let's say I think we've solved the case."

She draped her coat over the back of a chair. "Congratulations. So tell me. Did it turn out to be a leaf-in-the-forest crime?"

He stirred briskly and poured the drinks. "Yes. And it may be the first where the killer is one of the leaves."

"What do you mean? How—"

He thrust a chilled glass at her. "Wrap yourself around this and let me do the talking." He raised his glass. "Here's to full disclosure. That's what broke the case." He took a sip and registered approval of his artistry. "I got a call from the dress manufacturer's wife. Mrs. Hellman. She had told me her husband's life was insured for two million dollars. And now, in the interest of full disclosure, she wanted me to know that she would actually be getting *four* million dollars."

"Because . . . ?"

"Because, her lawyer informed her, the policy called for double indemnity in case of death in a railroad accident, a fire, or by murder. It's an insurance-company come-on. How many of their policy-

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holders are going to die that way?"

"So when he was killed—"

"He wasn't killed, he killed himself. The books didn't show it, but it turns out Hellman House was about to go belly up. The cleanest way Hellman knew to assure a comfortable future for his children and the wife he had pampered for twenty years was to fake his murder. So he killed that poor wino in the park and then himself. Once the insurance gimmick pointed to him we searched his office again. More thoroughly. The telltale lipstick, 'Follow Me,' was stuck in the toilet drain in the private bathroom at his office."

"Bernie, wait a sec. The saloon owner in Queens—Flynn?—wasn't killed until a week after Arthur Hellman was dead and buried."

"That was a copycat crime. Not uncommon in high-profile serial cases. We never released the name of the off-brand lipstick in the first two murders. Casey's nose was smeared with a Revlon product you can pick up anywhere. We're building a case against his estranged wife. Always look first for the insignificant other."

Sylvie sipped her drink while she took the time to absorb this. Finally she said, "And where does Lester Beckerhof fit in the solution?"

"Never fear. Beckerhof will be fully briefed." Farber's assurance was as transparent as his martini.

"What do you mean, *will* be? Will be when?"

Farber said, "In tomorrow morning's *Times*." ●

A Classic **(continued from page 2)**

This spring, thanks to Stephen King, director David Koepp, and the stars of *Secret Window*—Johnny Depp, John Turturro, Timothy Hutton, Maria Bello, and Charles S. Dutton—the name Ellery Queen will probably be heard for the first time by hundreds of thousands of young people. Needless to say, that's gratifying to me and the rest of the *EQMM* staff. In a more general way, though, it should bring pleasure to everyone who'd like our culture to embrace more of the things that hold their value from generation to generation. We all like to think that the good things of our youth will not only exist throughout our lives, but carry on after we're gone. Even if I weren't *EQMM*'s editor, I'd count this magazine as one of those things.

As new generations "discover" this magazine of their parents and grandparents, I'd like to caution them that what's inside may turn out to be as surprising to them as those once-racy covers. Because that's what *EQMM* has always done, and will continue to do: unsettle, excite, and surprise. ●

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NEXT-DOOR DAVE

by Michael Collins

We are fascinated by hangings, executions. Hundreds of millions of us all across the world. It's the animal part of the brain we are born with. Atavistic. Barbarian.

He was hanging from a low branch of a native toyon tree in Alameda Park, between an Australian red eucalyptus and a Canary Island palm. I'd been staked out in a corporate fraud case since ten last night, and was walking back to my car on the far side of the park in the first light of a cool June dawn in Santa Barbara. Half an hour earlier and I'd have missed him in the darkness.

He hadn't died at dawn. Later, the assistant coroner would tell us he'd been hanging there since somewhere around two A.M., give or take an hour. Between one A.M. and three A.M. is a bad time for the lonely, the abandoned, the despairing, and the irrelevant. All the wounded souls lost in life.

I should have left him hanging there like forgotten fruit on an orange tree, and called the police. But there seems to be another atavistic need in us to cut them down, as if somehow that will help them long after they needed the help they never got. Finally end their suffering, give them a decent burial. Or maybe it's our suffering we need to end, our guilt we need to bury.

The branch was low, but not low enough for me to reach up to the rope. I found a trash receptacle under the red eucalyptus, rolled it to the toyon, upended it, held onto the tree, and climbed on top. A one-armed man can't lift a corpse to take the weight off the rope and untie the knot, so I used my pocketknife on the rope. He hit the bare dirt and leaves below with the sound of a side of

Michael Collins is the pen name literary author Dennis Lynds uses for his "Dan Fortune" novels and stories—one of the longest running of all P.I. series, now nearing its 40th year. Collins is often credited with bringing the P.I. novel into the modern age by adding a sociological and philosophical dimension to the cases. None of Mr. Lynds' 60-plus books have been made into movies in the U.S., but a German company is said to be filming one of his children's series. †

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beef falling to the slaughterhouse floor. I jumped down and checked for vital signs. There were none.

In the brightening morning light, I examined him without touching the body. Tallish, maybe six-foot even, skinny and lean with that scarecrow look that comes from lack of upper-body muscle. In his early to mid forties, I guessed. He had thin pale hair, and a hairless, unlined face that was almost childlike. The rope was a nylon cord no thicker than my little finger. It had cut deep into his neck, drawing blood.

As near as I could tell without stripping the corpse, he had no other marks on him. No torn clothing, no bruises, no sign of struggle. His clothes were ordinary and mismatched: everyday brown slacks, a cheap KMart leather belt, a navy blue flannel shirt, green windbreaker, black leather dress shoes but white socks. There was no attempt at style, but everything was neat and clean.

I studied the tree, and the ground around it. The dirt and fallen leaves showed a chaos of partial footprints. The last week we'd had unusually clear, sunny weather for June, and the prints were mostly scuffs in the hard dry dirt, but there were a lot of them. No way of knowing, in the dry conditions, when any of them had been made. All lower branches had been cut from the toyon tree, leaving protrusions long enough for a determined person to get a foothold and climb the tree. Bark had been scraped off, and there were small gashes in the tree that could have been made by the toes of a hard leather shoe. It wasn't hard to read: He had climbed to the branch, tied the rope, and jumped.

I finally used my cell to call Sergeant Gus Chavalas at SBPD.

Chavalas held the dead man's keys, change, and wallet. That was all he'd had on him.

"David Zahn," he read from the driver's license. "Address on the lower Riviera. No suicide note."

"He doesn't look Riviera, and they don't always leave notes."

The sun was up by now. Chavalas and I were standing near the assistant coroner as he examined the body while the crime-scene team was searching the park with Chavalas's people.

"Suicide," Chavalas said.

The assistant coroner wasn't as sure. "Probably, but I won't be certain until I open him up."

Assistant coroners in Santa Barbara County were doctors in private practice doing their civic duty, and picking up extra cash on the side.

"What, then?" Chavalas asked. "Murder? You got anything to suggest that, Doc? Because there sure isn't anything under that tree or in the park so far."

"As I said, Sergeant, I need the autopsy," the doctor insisted

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stubbornly. This assistant coroner didn't like suicide. It frustrated him. He hated criminals, and liked to help condemn them, almost as much as he hated lawyers and insurance companies. He looked toward the toyon tree. "Someone could have carried the body here and strung it up."

"He'd have to be mighty strong," Chavalas said.

"Two men could have done it."

"None of the footprints are deep enough," I pointed out.

The doctor snorted. "In this weather?"

The crime-scene team continued to work, but Chavalas's gang came back shaking their heads.

"Nothing," one of them said.

About then a *News-Press* reporter who knew me showed up to interview Chavalas and the doctor. He'd probably been on the night desk, was tired and bored, and as frustrated as the doctor. Suicide doesn't sell papers or win awards. Unless it's someone important or notorious or both.

He finally came over to me. "Who you working for, Dan?"

"No one. I just found the guy hanging."

He perked up at that. "Yeah? You found him? How'd that happen?"

I could see the headline already shaping up in his mind: "Santa Barbara Private Eye Finds Hanging Victim." He could titillate, analyze, and run with that for a whole column before he had to get to the probability of suicide.

"I was walking to my car through the park, and there he was. A passing pedestrian, nothing more."

He ignored that, squeezed every detail from Chavalas and me, and every speculation out of the doctor. When he left, his eyes weren't exactly shining, but there was some hope in them of making a story out of the hanging.

The morgue van took the body away. Chavalas, his men, and the crime-scene team continued working, but without much enthusiasm. I went home to get some breakfast and sleep.

My office is in the back of the old red-tile-roofed hacienda Kay and I share in Summerland, one of the beach-and-surf enclaves of Santa Barbara. From the street, you have to walk through the avocado trees to the back door, and there's no sign out front. I don't encourage walk-in trade. Most people call. This woman didn't call and she didn't knock.

She seemed to materialize inside the doorway. "Dave didn't kill himself."

"Yes," I said, "he did."

"It's impossible."

"Maybe it is. He still hanged himself."

"Then someone drove him to it. They murdered him. Depraved

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indifference to human life."

"You've been watching too much *Law & Order.*"

"It's true, isn't it? It's just the same as murder."

"In New York, maybe. I don't know about California. Never heard of a case. It's almost impossible to prove, or make a judge accept."

"Then he was murdered. Something."

That was when she sat down on the floor and started to cry.

Behind my desk, I watched her for a time. A small woman, early thirties, not beautiful, but pretty and as slim as a girl. Dressed in black slacks, a simple pale blue mannish blouse, and dark brown sandals. Light hair, not blond but sun-bleached. There's a lot of that in Santa Barbara. What there isn't a great deal of are dark blue eyes full of not pain exactly but a kind of naked sadness.

I got up, got my hand under her arm, lifted her from the floor, and sat her in the bleached leather armchair I keep for clients. It had once been dark brown. I think that was the first time she noticed my missing arm. She dried her eyes, looked up at me. Her voice was gentle. "I'm sorry. How did it happen?"

I tell most of them I lost it in a war, a racing-car accident, mountain climbing. A crocodile bit it off, or a shark, or a lion. Anything dangerous, exotic, bizarre. It's what they want, a thrill. This woman didn't. She wanted to include me and my lost arm in her sadness and her hurt.

"An accident when I was a kid," I told her honestly as I walked back behind my desk and sat again. "What was he to you? David Zahn?"

She hesitated, as if not quite sure what she had been to Zahn. "I was his friend."

"That's it? A friend? Nothing more?"

"Well," the hesitation still, "I guess he would have said his girlfriend. I mean, sometimes, when he wanted . . ." She trailed off.

I said, "Sex?"

She looked straight at me across my desk. Not embarrassed, not worried about herself, worried about me. "When he needed it. Once, sometimes twice a month."

"But not a real girlfriend. Not a relationship. He wasn't your boyfriend. Just sex sometimes when he needed it."

Now she did look away, but not because of herself. "Not like that. Not what you mean."

"How do you know what I mean?"

"I . . . I guess I don't."

"No," I said, "you don't."

She winced as if slapped. A sensitive woman. "Dave couldn't handle a relationship." She looked back at me. "He was slow."

"Slow? You mean retarded?"

"Borderline," she said. "He held a job, had a car. He could take

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care of himself fine. But no way he could take on the responsibility of a relationship. I liked him, that's all. He was a sweet man. Kind. He loved animals, was always feeding stray cats. He couldn't afford that, really. That's why he didn't have one of his own."

"How borderline?" I asked. The retarded don't usually commit suicide. It takes planning, intellectualization of mental pain. They usually become sad and unhappy, not despondent.

"Maybe sixty–sixty-five IQ."

On the top edge of low IQ. Maybe not enough for complicated reasoning, or to always understand the consequences of his actions, but more than enough to despair. "And you can't think of any reason he'd hang himself?"

"No."

"But you saw him only once or twice a month?"

"Maybe a little more. I share an apartment in Carpinteria. He'd drive down to see me sometimes, and we'd have a hamburger, or walk on the beach. We both liked that."

"When did you see him last?"

"Maybe a month, two months ago. I've been away. Spring in Europe with a girlfriend. He drove down to my place before I left."

"How did he seem then? Worried? Unhappy?"

She shook her head. "Same as always. Serious, concerned I took everything I might need. Upbeat, sure I'd have a good time. Asked me to send postcards."

"Did you?"

"Of course."

"You have a name?"

"Marian Keane."

"Okay, Marian, what do you want me to do?"

"Find out what happened to poor Dave."

It was the right answer. "You have money?"

She nodded. I didn't ask how much. I suppose I knew I was doing this mostly pro bono. Even the marginally retarded seldom commit suicide.

Social Services for Santa Barbara County is at 234 Camino Del Remedio out in Goleta between the freeway and the mountains. I asked for David Zahn's caseworker. The plaque on her desk read *Condoleeza Fox,* and she sat bent over an open folder meticulously copying notes from a spiral notebook into an official document in the folder in a small, neat hand. After a few minutes, she sensed my presence and glanced up with the harried and defensive expression of the overworked.

"Can I help you?"

"I'd like to talk to you about David Zahn if you have a few minutes."

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"David?" She blinked as if astonished. Suspicion entered her eyes. "May I ask who you are?"

I placed my card in front of her. "Is it strange for someone to ask about Zahn?"

She nodded. "It certainly is. If all my cases were like Dave's, I could have twice the number and still not be overworked."

"Tell me about him. Where he worked. Was he getting assistance? Welfare?"

"SSI, some welfare, and Medicaid. He's worked at the same place for seventeen years." She got up and dug a file from one of her four filing cabinets. "Import Furniture Outlet down on West Cota."

"Ever in any trouble?"

"Not really, and hardly ever shows up at my office. He's pretty independent, and takes good care of himself. I check him maybe twice a year, but nothing much ever changes. He's always fine." She glanced down at my card. "What could he possibly have done to interest a private investigator?"

"He died," I told her. "Sorry."

I don't think she even heard the "sorry." "Died? That's crazy. I mean, at his age? What happened? An accident? How terrible."

"You don't think it could have been murder?"

Her eyes widened. "Murder? Who could possibly have wanted to kill Dave? Was it a robbery? A fight?"

"Fight? Was he prone to getting into fights? Was that the reservation when I asked if he'd ever been in trouble, and you said, 'Not really'?" I had seen nothing on his face or clothes under that toyon tree to suggest a fight, or past fights.

She hesitated. Then nodded. "Sometimes fights in bars. Not many, he didn't go into bars much. He never started it, and he always lost. Maybe once every few years he'd get beaten badly enough to go to the emergency. They'd call me."

"What were the fights about?"

She sighed. "When he had one beer too many, which, by the way, would be two, he sometimes butted into an argument and told someone he or she was wrong. He would be solemn and serious, and blurt out exactly what he thought. Once in a while it got him hit."

Solemn, stiff, humorless, and odd, he would incense some people whether they knew his handicap or not. "I don't think he'd been in a fight."

"Then I ask again, what? Robbery? Accident?"

"It looks like suicide."

"Suicide?" She stared at me. "Now that I don't believe. Yes, he could get low sometimes about his condition, who wouldn't, but he was generally pretty upbeat if not exuberant. His solemn, serious, generally unsmiling manner was only the surface. A lot of slow people are like that." She seemed to have a sudden thought. "What

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about his car? A maroon Ford Escort. Where is it? He loved that car, the only thing that made him smile, except his friend Marian. Did they find his car? If not, maybe—"

"I'll check with the police. What about family?"

"None I ever heard of. Dave came to Santa Barbara maybe twenty years ago. From Ohio, he said. But he never listed parents or siblings or anyone from there."

That sounded like a history. And not a good one. There are many parents who can't accept a child who isn't like them.

Import Furniture Outlet was a large storefront downtown near the freeway, set back far enough from West Cota to have parking in front. Horizontal ceiling fans turned lazily in the cool, shadowed, expansive interior crammed with exotic furniture from across the world, but with a heavy emphasis on larger Mexican pieces, from straight chairs and heavy coffee tables to massive china cabinets and ornate four-poster beds. It didn't look much like an outlet store, but everything was a gimmick today, and people flock to outlets thinking they're getting a deal, feeling savvy, putting one over on the dolts who always went to brand-name stores.

The manager—a short, soft-looking man whose waist had expanded into a potbelly—was out on the floor with a customer. He was ready to be angry when I broke in, but I gave him my card, told him about Dave, and his fleshy face collapsed like a leaking balloon. He asked me to wait in his office until he was finished with the customer, nodding to a glassed-in cubicle in the far rear corner.

The only occasional chair in the office had a red leather seat. I picked up the store catalog and read until he hurried in about twenty minutes later.

He closed the door. "Suicide? Aw hell, that's awful." He read my card. "Fortune, right? I'm Jerry Marks. Christ, I hope it wasn't because of the job. I'd talked Mr. McCaw out of that."

"Who's Mr. McCaw and what did you talk him out of?"

He walked around behind his desk and sat down wearily. "McCaw's the owner. He was thinking of letting Dave go."

Getting fired would be a blow to anyone. "His social worker told me he'd been here seventeen years."

"Almost since we been open."

"Is McCaw a new owner?"

"Not that new. Bought the business six years ago. Kept everyone on."

"Why the change of attitude?"

Marks shrugged, and there was bitterness in his voice. "Times've changed. It's all about hustle today. Volume and turnover. Get the stuff in, slap it together, and sell it fast. McCaw says we can't sell what isn't there. We can't sell a gap on the floor.

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Time is money."

"Dave worked too slowly?"

Marks nodded. "He was solid as a rock, but fast he wasn't. Methodical, steady, reliable, that was Dave. Do it right, the way the old boss taught him. Happy to have a job around other people, never bored. The girls we hire now, most of 'em up from Mexico and probably illegals, work fast. So what if the stuff wobbles, bolts are missing, pieces fall off, and the buyers have to bring items back to be fixed? The stuff's sold, a lot of the buyers fix mistakes themselves, or have their handyman do it, we don't see it again, and the bottom line looks great."

His flabby face was like a rubber mask, a miserable mask. "I'd sold McCaw on the idea that Dave could be the guy that fixed anything that came back on us. That way, the girls could keep pouring out the stuff instead of having to stop and fix a return."

"But Dave didn't know that?"

"It wasn't a done deal. All he knew was that McCaw was thinking about letting him go." He chewed a fingernail. "But no way he kills himself over that. I mean, there's other jobs like ours where speed don't matter. He'd get a hell of a good recommendation from me. Besides, he had assistance, wasn't going to starve. Social Services takes care of him."

"That's the theory," I said.

He went to work on another nail. "You sure it was suicide?"

"Pretty sure. Why?"

"Well, Dave spoke a little street Spanish, and he liked to talk and joke with the new girls straight from Mexico, like the rest of us. Just trying to be friendly, you know? Be like everyone else. Only those girls, they don't understand a guy forty-plus trying to be friendly, they think he's coming on to them. He's so *old,* and, well, funny, strange, weird, *loco.* A couple of their boyfriends didn't understand, and tried to make trouble."

"You wouldn't have their names, would you?"

"Sure do. I wanted them to know they wasn't coming back if they caused any more fuss. Told them I'd fire their girlfriends if they didn't tell me their names and where they worked."

He wrote it all down before I left, and I drove to the two workplaces. One was a fast-food warehouse in Goleta where Luis Alvarez worked the night shift. He'd been there all night on the night Dave Zahn died. The time sheet and four witnesses including the manager agreed on that. The other turned out to be an all-night Mexican saloon and restaurant on the Lower East Side. Eufemio Morelos was the night dishwasher. He was the only dishwasher and the dishes had been washed.

I shouldn't have been surprised. They were clearly free to call on their girlfriends and become angry with Dave at Imported Furni-

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ture Outlet during the day often enough for Marks to know them by sight, and night work in Santa Barbara is nearly all Mexican and most often illegal.

From the car, I called Chavalas at SBPD. "Zahn had a car. You find it?"

"A maroon Ford Escort parked a block from the park. You working on this?"

"For his girlfriend. She says he wouldn't kill himself, and if he did someone drove him to it. Too much TV, but she's pretty torn up, needs everything ruled out before she can let go."

"I know. She's been here."

"Any note in the car?"

"No."

"You dust the car?"

"His prints everywhere, the girlfriend's too. A few unknowns."

"You checking them?"

"No reason, Dan. Doc reported it's definitely suicide. Case closed."

"He maybe had family in Ohio."

"Nothing we've found."

"What about at his place up on the Riviera?"

"He didn't live there anymore. Moved out a few weeks ago. We don't know where he's been living."

"You going to find out? At least to see if you can find his family?"

"That's Social Services' job, Dan. Like I said—"

"I know. Case closed."

Definite suicide, bury David Zahn and move on. Life cannot serve death. All the facts are in. All except the why, the reason. That's what Marian Keane wanted to know, and so did I.

I clicked off and dialed the Imported Furniture Outlet. "Marks? Do you have Dave Zahn's new address?"

"New address? He moved? He never told me. When?"

"About a month ago. Look it up, would you?"

I heard the phone being put down on the desk, computer keys tapping. He came back on the line. "Only address I have is the one on the Riviera. Same one he had when he got here. Only a month, you say? Probably just hadn't gotten round to telling me."

Twenty years is a long time to live in one place. Especially when you only rent. I made one more call. Marian Keane answered at once, as if waiting beside the phone for my call. "Mr. Fortune? Have you found—?"

"Not sure yet. You can help. Where did Dave move to?"

"Move?"

"A month ago."

The shocked silence stretched. I knew that silence. She was beating herself up. She'd been in Europe, maybe when Dave

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needed her. "I didn't know. I . . . I only returned three days ago. I was busy, didn't call him. It was on my list for Saturday."

"So you had no idea he'd moved from the Riviera?"

"No." She would beat herself up for the rest of the day.

The address turned out to be a nice two-story stucco and dark-brown timber Monterey, complete with second-story gallery on three sides, on a steep street of the lower Riviera. A shiny new blue-and-white ceramic tile plaque on top of the mailbox proclaimed in large blue letters: Casa Carter—Mark Carter, Proprietor. No one answered my ring, and the two-car garage was open and empty.

A man next-door, out watering in the middle of the afternoon, called over, "He's not home. Saw him leave all dressed up maybe an hour ago. Looked like he had some important errand."

"I'm looking for his former tenant. David Zahn. You have any idea where Zahn went?"

"Dave?" He shook his head sadly. "Afraid not. Hell, none of us knew he'd moved until about two weeks ago."

"Us?"

He swept his arm around the entire street. "Dave was sort of a neighborhood talisman. Always driving past in that Escort, erect as a ramrod, both hands on the wheel, looking straight ahead. Or washing the car, changing the oil. Solemn as a church deacon." He smiled, seeing sober, serious Dave in his mind. "Made you feel everything was right and safe to see Dave. He lived over there next-door in Mrs. Margrave's little one-room cabin twenty years at least. Before a lot of the people here now. We were all saddened when he left. I don't think any of us knew his last name. He was just Next-Door Dave."

"He had a high profile?"

"Hell no. Unless he was working on the car, or driving past, we didn't know he was around. Of course, being next-door, I saw him most every day. Didn't smile much, dressed funny, liked to feed stray cats, but who doesn't in this neighborhood?" He laughed.

"He didn't tell anyone he was going to move?"

"Not that I know. A couple of weeks ago someone noticed the old cabin over there," he nodded toward the Monterey where I stood in the driveway, "behind old lady Margrave's house was gone, and we all realized we hadn't seen him in a while. I asked Carter. He told us Dave moved out. Gave no reason."

I thanked him, went back to the car, and phoned the social worker. She kept me on hold for about five minutes. I studied the street more carefully as I waited. It was typical lower Riviera: small to medium-sized houses that had cost maybe ten thousand dollars forty years ago, and went for up to a million now; a relaxed atmosphere that did not fit so well with million-dollar houses; and

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good if not great views over the city and the harbor and out across the Pacific to Santa Cruz and Santa Rosa Islands.

"Yes, Mr. Fortune?"

"Did Dave give you a new address the last month or so?"

"No. Had he moved?"

"Apparently."

"That's odd. We were supposed to always know where he was. He knew that. It's not like him."

"No," I agreed. "It doesn't sound like what he would do. Can you think of anyone else who would know where he was living?"

"City Housing and Development. If he needed a place, he'd go there to find out what was available. Unless he found one through a friend, or the grapevine."

"Did he have many friends?"

"Ms. Keane's the only one I know. She should be able to tell you."

"She's been in Europe for two months."

"Then City Housing's your best bet."

The City Housing and Redevelopment Office for Santa Barbara is at 630 Garden Street. The small, thin, gray-haired official who handled low-income and special-needs rentals, and emergency and short-term shelters, looked as permanently discouraged as a public defender in Texas. In an affluent city like Santa Barbara, he didn't have a lot to work with on any of those fronts.

"Zahn, you said?" He wearily dug into a plastic file-tray on his desk and extracted a thin folder. He nodded, and sighed, "Here it is. David Zahn. I remember him. Marginally retarded, very little income."

"That's him. You have an address?"

He blinked at me. "You're kidding? This Zahn wanted a one-room studio with cooking and bathroom, no roommate, and he wanted it tomorrow." He shook his head in wonder. "You have any idea what a single like that goes for in today's market? He couldn't begin to afford it. Maybe if I'd had six months or a year to look, twist arms, get lucky, and have someone die. But right away? I could get him a shared room, but he didn't want that."

"Then where did he go?"

"I referred him to a group shelter, but I heard he never showed up. I don't know where he was living. Maybe he found what he really wanted." He sounded almost hopeful.

It didn't last. He looked at me with those discouraged eyes. "You know what he really wanted? What he'd always had. That's what he told me. He wanted his home."

That was when I knew.

As I drove toward the Riviera once more, I called Chavalas again. "Were there clothes, food, whatever in Zahn's Escort?"

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"In the trunk. Two suitcases. Nothing in the car itself. We figured he'd been finishing his move to his new place when something set him off."

"No," I said, "he wasn't finishing his move."

Dave had always been neat, tidy.

When I reached the Riviera address, a black Lexus stood in the garage. I rang the bell. The man who came to the door was relatively young, mid forties. About David Zahn's age. Stocky and solid with a pleasant oval face and small features. Your average good-looking American middle-class male. More baseball and handball than tennis, I would have expected, but he wore a white tennis outfit and carried a racket.

"Yes?" His voice was slightly annoyed. What was I doing ringing his bell?

"Mark Carter?"

"What do you want?"

"It's about your former tenant, David Zahn." I held out my card.

"Zahn? He wasn't really my tenant, I only bought the place two months ago, so I don't know—" He read the card and looked up. "A private detective? Has Zahn done something? Hurt someone?"

Apparently, he had not read the newspaper yet. Or maybe he didn't get the *News-Press.*

"What makes you think he might hurt someone?"

"Did you know him? He was pretty weird. Creepy, you know. He scared me sometimes, living out there in that shack. I'm a broker, work out of the house. Clients come here."

"That why he moved out? He made you feel creepy?"

"That was part of it. But, like I said, I recently bought the place, and I've got plans to renovate, make the place exactly what I want."

"And Zahn didn't fit into your plans."

He shook his head. "No, he sure didn't. I like my privacy. Don't need or want any tenant, and that shack was an eyesore. Face it, the shack and Zahn ruined the ambiance of the yard. I gave him a month, and tore the place down the second he was gone."

"What did you do with his furniture and the other things he left?"

"How did you know about that?" He shrugged. "Zahn hasn't come back for it. So I put it in storage for him. I expect he'll show up soon."

"I don't think so," I told him. "He's dead."

"Dead?"

"Suicide," I said. "He hanged himself in Alameda Park. It was in the *News-Press.* He'd been living in his car. That's how I knew he didn't take his furniture."

He frowned. "I get the *L.A. Times.*" I could see his mind working. Then everything about him from his eyes to his clenched hands became defensive. "Hey, that's not my fault. I told you, he was weird, unstable. I saw that the moment I walked into that shack.

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You can't lay his suicide on me."

"No, I can't. I expect there were a lot of things that came together. You were just the last straw. The trigger."

Defensive and belligerent, his heels dug in. "I had plans for the place. That shack was ruining my view. I have a right to the house and land I want."

"Yes," I said, "you do."

"It's my property. I can do what I want with it."

"Yes, you can."

I left Mark Carter standing in his open doorway, walked to my car, and drove away. I'd let Chavalas find out where Next-door Dave's belongings had been stored. The police and Social Services could try to find something that would lead them to where Dave's parents lived in Ohio so they could be notified. I didn't think the parents would care much, and I had a hard enough job to do.

I had to explain it all to Marian Keane. She would beat herself up for months, maybe years, blame herself for failing Dave. She would blame Mark Carter, but she would be wrong. His actions weren't entirely his fault. We are all products of where we are born, and when. Of our parents and relatives and neighbors. Of what we are taught and what we learn. Ninety percent of us, give or take, accept the worlds both large and small into which we are born, and what those worlds teach us. What we learn and never transcend. ●

EQMM Goes to the Movies **(continued from page 29)**

with, and we hear the moody reply: "You don't want to know." Or, in other scenes with other characters, the ever-popular "I know what you're up to." Helping to balance the film's creative ledger is that the creaks, crashes, cracks, shouts, slams, and screams have been kept to a minimum, replaced by the bass drums and deep-throated brass in Philip Glass's evocative score. But let's not forget that brooding declarations and perilous screams and crashing cymbals are, in part, why those of us who like to be scared go to see a thriller.

Secret Window is a more realistic, less artificially "jacked up" psychological thriller than some of the other films based on King's writings. And though its slower pace might not appeal to the buckets-of-blood brigade, an argument could be made that because the story lies entirely within the realm of human possibility, it is all the more terrifying. The movie's mounting psychological malevolence has been vigilantly nurtured by Koepp and company, and despite the film's somewhat less credible ending, it is reasonably faithful to the written story, which should keep Stephen King's readers from storming the gates of Hollywood any time soon. ●

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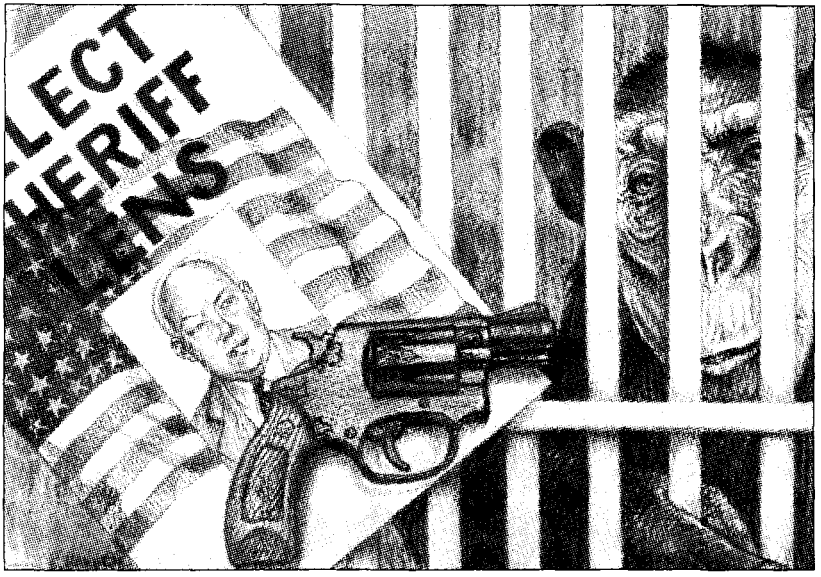

Art by Laurie Harden

The Problem of the Candidate's Cabin

by Edward D. Hoch

Sheriff Lens had decided to run for his seventh and final term of office in November of 1942, with the nation in the midst of its greatest war. He'd first been elected in 1918, nearly four years before I set up practice in Northmont (Dr. Sam was explaining to his frequent visitor and drinking companion), and I'd supported him every time since. This would be his first race since my marriage to Annabel almost a year earlier, on December 6, 1941, and she was at my side as much as possible in campaigning for him.

Her veterinary business, Annabel's Ark, the most complete in our part of the state, now boasted two assistants to help with the work load. That meant she could spend more evenings at home, and during the month of October it allowed her to join me at local rallies for Sheriff Lens. His opponent that year was a young man

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named Ray Anders, a pleasant enough fellow whose sole experience had been two years as a deputy sheriff.

We'd attended one of Anders's rallies to see what we were up against. It was held in the Grange Hall on a Sunday afternoon and we stood near the back of the crowded room so as not to attract attention. Anders, a dark-haired fellow in his late twenties, had a certain charm about him. Sometimes he joked about owning a log cabin at the edge of town, but he was no Abe Lincoln. Everyone knew he and his wife also had a nice home near the town square. He started out by commending our brave Marines who were still locked in a fierce battle for the island of Guadalcanal, then explained that a rheumatic heart condition kept him out of the service. Somehow this led into a call for younger men, new blood in the county sheriff's department.

Although the Dr. Sam Hawthorne series to which this new Ed Hoch story belongs seems eminently filmable, and was even conceived by the author as a series that might prove appropriate for TV, it has never proved as popular with producers as some of the other Hoch series, especially that featuring offbeat thief Nick Velvet, who was the star of a French TV series and has been under option in the U.S. for decades. ✝

"My opponent is an able, honest man," he announced, "but he has been our sheriff for twenty-four years! He is fifty-six years old!"

That was true enough. Sheriff Lens was ten years older than me. But I could feel him bristle at my side when his age was mentioned. I laid a restraining hand on his arm lest he shout out some comment. In the seats ahead of us some of Anders's followers took up the chant, "New blood! New blood!"

I steered Sheriff Lens toward the door before his rage boiled over. "Can you imagine?" he sputtered once we were outside. "I gave him his job! Two years he worked for me, and never made an arrest that I can remember. Maybe he issued a speeding ticket or two. Now he thinks he'd make a better sheriff than me!"

"Calm down!" I pleaded. "Do you want to have a heart attack?"

"Why? Because of my age? Because I'm fifty-six?"

I sighed and pushed him along out the door. Sheriff Lens had never been my patient for the simple reason that he was remarkably healthy for his age. His wife Vera helped see to that. His health would not be an issue in the campaign, but his age was obviously becoming one.

The campaign manager for Ray Anders was a man named Cassell. His first name was Jonathan, but he liked to be known as Major

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Cassell, claiming he'd earned the rank in the Great War, as he still called it. A man in his early fifties, he'd been on the fringes of state politics for years. Managing a campaign for sheriff of a town like Northmont was quite a comedown for him, and I wondered what had brought him to us. Maybe it was money. Ray Anders was married to Jane Brophy, whose family had a profitable tobacco farm outside of town. Rumor had it her money was financing her husband's campaign, and that might have included Major Cassell. Certainly he was staying at their log cabin, which in a sense had been part of Jane Anders's dowry.

We talked about it that night over dinner at the sheriff's house, with Vera serving her favorite lamb chops. Annabel was convinced it was Major Cassell's strategy to focus on the sheriff's age. "It really upsets me that he'd stoop to such tactics," she fumed.

"Do you know Ray Anders?" I asked.

"No. I treated his wife's pet monkey once. She seemed nice enough."

"Jane Anders or the monkey?" Vera Lens asked, passing a plate around the table.

We all laughed and Annabel answered, "Both of them, actually."

But Sheriff Lens quickly turned serious. "How are we gonna tackle this age issue, Doc? No one's ever raised it against me before."

"That's because you weren't fifty-six before," I told him. "It's certainly not old by today's standards, but when you were born the life expectancy at birth was only around forty-six. Even today it's only sixty-two for white males. We can't make you younger. The only thing to do is to keep plugging away at your experience on the job. Give the voters statistics on the number of murder cases you've solved."

"Mostly with your help," the sheriff observed. "He'll probably point that out."

We finished dinner and smoked our cigars while the women did the dishes. At home I helped Annabel with the dishes, but I knew that Sheriff Lens was of a different generation, even if he was only ten years older than me. "You're going to win," I told him, trying to boost his spirits. "There's no way that Ray Anders is going to be elected sheriff of this county."

But as October dragged on, with a New England autumn so lovely we almost forgot about the war, Anders seemed to be picking up support. A few of the deputies who'd worked with Anders appeared at his rallies, and I could see Sheriff Lens was hurt by their defection. Vera even took a highly unscientific poll of voters by calling one hundred residents listed in the phone book. Forty were for Sheriff Lens, thirty-seven for Ray Anders, and the rest

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undecided. Of course some folks still didn't have phones and there was no telling how they would vote.

On October twenty-sixth, eight days before the election, there was a bad scene outside the sheriff's office. Rob Gallagher, one of the deputies supporting Anders, was handing out fliers for him in the parking lot. I happened to be driving by just in time to see the sheriff come storming out to confront him. Fearing the worst, I skidded to a quick halt across the street and ran over to join them.

"I'm off duty!" Gallagher was insisting. "And I'm out of the office. What I'm doing here is known as free speech, Sheriff. Do you want to fire me for it?"

Gallagher was a slender but muscular fellow, a bit over six feet tall and a quarter-century younger than Sheriff Lens. If they came to blows I knew who would be on the losing end. "Okay, you two," I yelled, pulling them apart. "Go back inside, Sheriff."

He started to say something but then thought better of it. He turned on his heel and retreated to the office.

"Are you going to tell me to stop, too, Doc?" Gallagher asked.

"Just move away, Rob. Exercise your free speech out of the sheriff's sight."

"I cleared this with Major Cassell. He said I was within my rights."

"I'm sure he did. But let's try to keep this election civil."

I followed Sheriff Lens into his office and closed the door. "What was that all about?" I asked.

"I don't know, Doc. I've never faced a campaign like this. Hell, half the time I've run unopposed! I even had the Democrats' endorsement a couple of times."

"It's clear that Rob Gallagher is supporting Anders. What about the other deputies?"

"A few of them are leaning toward Anders, but Gallagher's the only real problem. He's a registered Republican, but he's a good friend of Anders. He'd like to have his buddy behind this desk instead of me."

"You're still ahead in Vera's telephone poll."

"That could change overnight." I knew he was right. These last eight days could make or break him.

The following morning, Tuesday, I was awakened early by the ringing of the phone. Annabel answered and passed the receiver to me. "It's Sheriff Lens."

I groaned, still half asleep. "What time is it?"

"Almost six."

"Hello, Sheriff. What is it?"

"I just had a call from Major Cassell. He reports there's a prowler trying to break into his cabin. I have to go out there."

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"Are you on night duty?"

"I'm home in bed, like you. But he phoned here, not the sheriff's office. Something's funny, Doc."

"I'll meet you there as soon as I can," I promised. Annabel buried her face in the pillow.

The Anderses' log cabin at the edge of town, where Major Cassell had been staying during the election campaign, was a sturdy, professionally built place that looked more like a vacation home than something carved out of the forest by pioneers. The eastern sky was beginning to glow with daylight as I drove up, parking behind the sheriff's car, a deputy's vehicle, and a shiny Buick that I knew to be Cassell's. The first thing I saw was Rob Gallagher on the cabin's porch with his revolver drawn. He was pointing it through the open front window.

"Gallagher!" I called out. "What's happened?"

"I'm not sure," he replied without turning toward me. "It looks like Sheriff Lens killed Major Cassell."

The sheriff was certainly ready to kill somebody by the time we returned to his office later that morning. He had not yet been formally charged, but Deputy Gallagher made it clear that he would file a full report with the district attorney. "It's an election frame-up!" he bellowed at me in his office. "Anders will do anything to defeat me!"

I tried to calm him down. "I doubt if that would extend to murdering his campaign manager. Tell me again exactly what happened out there."

He took a deep breath, attempting to settle down. "I told you he called me about a prowler. That in itself seemed odd, but I didn't want to turn the call over to Gallagher so I dressed quickly and drove out there. Cassell's car was the only one at the cabin when I reached it. He didn't answer my knock and the door was locked. I could see a light burning through the living-room window, so I went over and looked in. Major Cassell was stretched out on the floor, exactly as you saw him. I could see blood and what looked like a bullet wound to his head. I checked all the windows, looking for an open one, but they were all locked. The cabin has only the one door, and that was locked, too. Finally, I smashed the living room window, unlatched it, and climbed through. He was dead, of course, and I saw a revolver on the floor across the room. I also saw that the cabin door was locked and bolted. That was when Rob Gallagher appeared at the window with his gun drawn."

"No one else was hiding in the cabin?"

The sheriff shook his head. "You were there when we searched the place. It's just a living room with a small kitchen at one end, a bedroom, and bathroom. There's no basement or attic. The only

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other living creature was that monkey locked in its cage."

The monkey was a chimpanzee, Jane Anders's pet that Annabel had treated at the Ark. It was big, weighing around fifty pounds. I didn't know what it was doing in the cabin with Major Cassell, but we could hardly consider it a suspect. "Gallagher's report is going to say he found you alone in that locked cabin with Cassell's body. No one else could have entered unless Cassell let them in, and in that case, how did they get out while leaving the place locked from the inside? That door was both locked and bolted, as you said."

"You know there are lots of tricks with door bolts, Doc."

I agreed, but not in this case. "That was the first thing I examined. The bolt is built into the door and locked by turning a knob. It's not the sort you can pull shut with a string or drop into place with a melting ice cube. The door had also been locked with a key, but I assume both Anders and Cassell had keys."

"The windows, then. One of the panes could have been removed and put back."

Again I shook my head. "I checked every one. They're all firmly in place, except for the one you broke to gain entrance. And the fireplace chimney's too narrow for even a midget Santa Claus."

"Could it have been suicide, Doc?" Sheriff Lens asked, the lines of his face deepening with concern.

"I don't see how. There were no powder burns and the revolver was on the floor across the room. There was one shot fired. I'd be surprised if it's not the murder weapon."

"It's not my gun! Mine was in my holster until Gallagher confiscated it. You don't think he'll switch them, do you?"

"No chance of that. I wrote down the serial numbers of both weapons." However, it bothered me that both revolvers were Smith & Wesson .38-caliber, the standard weapon for the sheriff and his deputies. The serial numbers were identical except for the last two digits, implying that they were acquired at the same time.

"They'll say I had a motive because Cassell was managing the Anders campaign and attacking me for being too old."

"Candidates don't shoot rivals for things that are said in the heat of a campaign, Sheriff."

"All they have to do is keep the doubt in voters' minds for one week, Doc. The election is a week from today."

By Wednesday morning all of Northmont was talking about it. The mayor had placed Sheriff Lens on paid leave of absence pending the outcome of the investigation. His service revolver had not fired the fatal shot, but the murder weapon was indeed one of a dozen purchased by the sheriff's office some years back. It had been kept in reserve, never assigned to a specific deputy.

"I haven't checked on those weapons in years," the sheriff

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admitted to me.

"Who had access to them?"

"Any one of my deputies. And maybe a couple of other people—my secretary Gretchen, for one."

It was only a few years back that Sheriff Lens had determined he needed someone to handle the paperwork. With nine deputies and increased criminal activity, he'd obtained funds from the town council to hire Gretchen Wild, an attractive middle-aged woman who'd moved here from Providence during the Depression. She was divorced, but I knew little else about her, and had chatted with her only a few times at the sheriff's office. Now, with Sheriff Lens sidelined at home, I decided to pay her a call.

She looked up from her typewriter, brushing her brown hair back from her forehead. "Dr. Hawthorne!" she greeted me with some surprise. "Sheriff Lens is—"

"I know. I wanted to speak with you."

"Deputy Gallagher is acting sheriff. Should I call him for you?"

"No, this is just a friendly chat."

"I want you to know right off that I can't believe Sheriff Lens had anything to do with what happened to Major Cassell."

"He'll appreciate knowing that. The sheriff has a good many friends in town and we're all standing behind him. What I want to ask you about is the storage of handguns here at the office."

She'd swiveled her chair around to face me, resting her hands on its arms. "The sheriff and his deputies each have their own weapons. They take them home when off duty, in case they're needed in an emergency."

"Counting the sheriff, there are ten men in the department. Some years back he purchased a dozen Smith & Wesson .38-caliber revolvers. The remaining two should be in this office."

"I don't think I've ever seen them," she admitted. "But they should be in the safe."

The old iron monster against the wall opposite the sheriff's desk had been there for as long as I could remember, and I'd rarely seen it open. Now Gretchen Wild shuffled around in her desk and came up with a combination, handwritten on a slip of paper. "Here it is," she said, and went over to twirl the dials. The old safe opened with a loud clunk as the bolts were pulled back. She opened an unlocked drawer and took out a revolver wrapped in an oily cloth. "This is one of the guns. The other doesn't seem to be here."

"Apparently it was used to kill Major Cassell," I told her.

"Oh."

"It looks like almost anyone might have had access to this safe," I observed, "if they knew the combination was right there in your desk."

"Nobody knew that except Sheriff Lens."

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"But any of the deputies might have come across it accidentally. Or someone might have been here when you opened the safe."

"I'm very careful about that," she insisted.

"Did you know Major Cassell?"

"I'd seen him around town with Ray Anders. I didn't really know him."

Her telephone rang and I decided there was nothing more to be learned from her. I waved and left the office.

By Wednesday afternoon I'd tracked down Ray Anders at an election rally in the parking lot at Berman's Feed Store. His wife Jane was with him, passing out the same fliers Gallagher had been distributing. "I'm cutting this rally short," the candidate was saying, "out of respect for my manager and good friend, Major Jonathan Cassell, who was brutally murdered yesterday morning. The remainder of this campaign will be dedicated to his memory, and if I am elected sheriff next Tuesday I promise that his killer will be brought to justice."

A cheer went up as the crowd began to scatter, heading for their trucks and wagons. I caught up with Anders and asked if we could talk for a few minutes. "You're trying to get Sheriff Lens off the hook, aren't you?" he asked with a grim expression. "This is one time you're going to fail, Sam. No one else could have killed Major Cassell. No one else had a motive to kill him."

"Rob Gallagher was conveniently at the scene, wasn't he? It's as if the whole thing was set up in advance."

"Gallagher was on road patrol Monday night. The telephone operator reported a muffled call for help from the cabin. When he arrived, the sheriff's car was already there and that window was broken."

"How long have you known Major Cassell? What brought him to a place like Northmont?"

"I met him at a party fund-raiser in Hartford. We got to talking and I mentioned I'd like to run for sheriff if I had someone to manage the campaign. That was last year. When I decided to give it a try, Jane suggested I contact him. He'd done some business with her father and had a lot of party connections."

Jane Anders worked her way through a few well-wishers to join us. "I hope you're not trying to get the sheriff off," she said. "What he did was a terrible thing!"

"That remains to be proven, Jane."

"Don't try to say it was self-defense. There were no signs of a struggle in the cabin."

"You were there?" I asked.

"I had to retrieve Max, my chimp. He was locked in his cage. The body and the weapon had already been removed, but everything

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seemed normal except for the broken window."

"How did it happen the chimp was out there in the first place?"

"I'd been working at the cabin during the summer, getting it painted and in shape for Major Cassell's arrival. Max was along to keep me company, and the major took an immediate liking to him. He asked that I leave him there. I was glad to do it. With all our campaigning, it was one less thing for me to attend to."

"Did either of you lend the major a pistol for protection? That cabin is a bit isolated."

"Of course not," Anders replied. "The murder weapon wasn't mine, if that's what you're thinking. I turned in my service revolver when I left the force last year. I'm sure there's a record of it."

"I'd like to learn more about Major Cassell if I could. I understand he did some work for your father, Jane. Would you have any objection to my speaking with him?"

My request took her by surprise, but she readily agreed. "My father is a wonderful man, but I doubt if he'll be able to help you much."

"I suppose no one could except Max," I told her. "Your chimp must have seen the whole thing."

On Thursday morning, while they were still deciding whether to charge Sheriff Lens with the killing, I drove out to Finian Brophy's tobacco farm. For as long as I'd lived in Northmont, they'd grown tobacco nearby, covering the fields with protective sheets when the sun grew too hot. Most of it went for cigars, and it had made the Brophy family rich. Now, in late October, the crop had been harvested, dried, and sold. Except for a few livestock, the farm would have little activity until spring. I'd telephoned in advance, and Brophy himself came out to meet me shortly after one o'clock.

He was a tall, slender man who looked more like a country squire than a tobacco farmer. His daughter Jane had his greenish eyes and manner of taking charge. "I don't believe we've really met before, Dr. Hawthorne. I'm Finian Brophy. Come into the house. My wife is in town today."

We sat opposite each other in a large den decorated with deer heads and a few stuffed pheasants. I didn't need to ask if he'd shot them himself. "I don't want to take up too much of your time," I told him. "It's about the killing of Major Cassell."

"Of course. Everyone knows the sheriff is a personal friend of yours." He reached over for a cut-glass decanter half filled with amber liquid. "Too early in the day for a little wine, Doctor?"

"Not at all. It's good for your health." I accepted the glass and said, "Sheriff Lens never killed Cassell. I'm trying to find out who

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did, and why. You had business dealings with the man, didn't you?"

"He did some work for me."

"What sort of work?"

"Lobbying the legislature on behalf of the state's tobacco interests."

I frowned at that news. "Cassell was a lobbyist?"

"One of the best in the state. Then last year he got into some trouble and decided he needed a lower profile for a while."

"What sort of trouble?"

Finian Brophy shrugged. "Someone accused him of bribery, passing money to one of the state assemblymen to insure passage of a bill. They're still investigating the charges."

"Not much point in it now that he's dead."

"No," Brophy agreed.

"Was your daughter satisfied with his work on the Anders campaign?"

"She certainly should have been. It was Cassell's idea to stress the age factor and call for new blood."

"Sheriff Lens says Cassell phoned him at home early Tuesday morning to report a prowler. Doesn't that seem odd to you?"

"If there was really a prowler it would be the natural thing to do."

"Rather than phone the sheriff's office?"

He waved a hand, dismissing it. "Perhaps the sheriff's home phone number was handier. How would I know?"

I glanced out the window at the distant fields. "Did you have a good crop this year?"

"Could have been better, but I've no complaints."

I left him, wondering if I'd really learned anything at all.

Ray Anders was not happy to see me when I stopped by his house later that afternoon. "I can tell you frankly, Sam, that nothing you say is going to change things. I honestly believe that Sheriff Lens shot him and I'd feel the same way even if I wasn't running against him."

There was a chattering sound from the next room and I saw the cage that was Max's home. The chimpanzee jumped up and down when he saw me, no doubt welcoming a new playmate. "If only he could talk," I said.

"It wouldn't be good for the sheriff if he could."

"What about you? Were you at home all night Monday?"

"Matter of fact, I spent the night in Shinn Corners. I had a breakfast rally there Tuesday morning."

Jane Anders came downstairs wearing a fancy cocktail dress of a sort rarely seen around Northmont. "We're on our way to dinner and another rally," she explained. "Sorry to cut your visit short."

"I spoke with your father earlier today," I said.

"He phoned to tell me."

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"I was just visiting with Max here. Does he ever get out of his cage?"

"He used to, all the time, until I put a spring lock on the cage door. Now he can get back inside by himself but he can't reach through the bars to turn the outside knob. Once he's in there we have to open it for him."

"Do you know if Major Cassell would take him out of the cage and play with him?"

"I think he did, a few times."

Max hopped up and down some more, demanding our attention.

"We really have to be going," Anders said. "We'll be late."

"Just one more question. The gun that fired the fatal shot—is there any possibility you might have acquired it while you were a deputy, kept it out at the cabin, and forgot to turn it in when you quit?"

He shook his head. "No, I told you I turned in the only weapon I had."

I walked out of the house ahead of them, wondering where to turn next.

Annabel had invited the sheriff and Vera over for dinner at our house, trying somehow to lift their spirits, but it was a dour evening. "I can't even campaign!" Sheriff Lens grumbled. "I start to speak and some heckler in the audience yells out, asking me why I killed Major Cassell."

"We can't go on like this," Vera said. "I want him to resign and let Anders be the sheriff if he's that eager."

"Resigning would just make him seem more guilty," I pointed out. "He has to fight this thing, Vera."

"It's Wednesday night, Doc," the sheriff said, in case I'd forgotten. "Six days till election."

"And three days until Halloween. We're going to win this for you, but we have to do it before the weekend so there's time for everyone to know you're innocent."

"Innocent!" he snorted. "I'd be in a jail cell already except the D.A. is on my side. He knows if I'm jailed or indicted before Tuesday Anders wins."

"Don't you have any ideas, Sam?" Annabel asked.

"Just one. Is it possible for a chimpanzee to fire a revolver?"

She sighed. "I doubt it, but I can't say for sure. Don't go wasting your time on it. Remember that orangutan in the potting-shed case? I think you suspected him for a while, too, but this isn't a story by Poe. Unless you can prove differently I'd favor a human killer."

"Perhaps I can prove differently," I said. "Maybe we can set up a reenactment at the cabin and see just what Max did Monday night."

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It was a crazy idea, but I had to do something, if only to hold out a slender hope for Sheriff Lens and Vera. Pressure was mounting to arrest him before Tuesday's voting, and we all knew that would be the end of him. I started out with Rob Gallagher, since he was the acting sheriff. On Thursday morning I showed up at his office and came right to the point.

"Rob, I want to reconstruct the crime scene as it was on Monday night."

"What's the point of that?"

"There's a chance, just an outside chance, that the chimp might have killed Major Cassell."

"Oh, come on, Sam! That's crazy! Monkeys don't fire guns."

"Max is a smart chimp. Jane Anders told me he could get out of the cage by himself until she changed the latch."

"Max was locked in his cage when I arrived," Gallagher reminded me. "He was nowhere near the murder weapon."

"But Jane says he could get back in the cage by himself and it had a snap lock. Suppose Major Cassell was playing with him—"

"At six in the morning?"

"—and the chimp found that revolver. He pulled the trigger and the bullet hit Cassell. Max was so frightened he ran back to his cage and pulled the door shut, locking it."

"All right," Gallagher said, "I'll tell you what's wrong with that. First, Cassell was fully dressed when he was killed. Second, he phoned Sheriff Lens about something. Does that sound like a man killing time by playing with a pet chimp? He was expecting someone, probably the sheriff."

"What about the prowler?"

"Sheriff Lens made that up."

"Why would he smash in the window and leave the door locked and bolted, making himself the only possible suspect?"

But the deputy had an answer for that, too. "Because I arrived on the scene while he was in the middle of setting it up to look like there'd been a prowler. He didn't have time to unlock the door Cassell bolted after letting him in. Five more minutes and he might have gotten away with it. Remember too that there were no fingerprints or even paw prints on that revolver. It had been wiped clean. Does that sound like monkey business to you?"

"Will you at least give him a chance and allow us to reenact the crime? The answers to some of your questions might become obvious in a reenactment. Anders will have to go along with it if you say so."

Rob Gallagher thought about it. Finally he nodded. "Sure, let's give it a try. If that chimp can really fire a revolver, it might cast doubt on the sheriff's guilt. I'll call Ray now and make the arrangements."

"Everything should be as it was Tuesday morning when we arrived."

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The sheriff's secretary, Gretchen Wild, had been typing at her desk while we talked. Now she turned and asked, "Will you be wanting those things we removed from the crime scene for fingerprinting?"

"What would those be?" I asked.

She brought out a labeled manilla envelope and opened it. "An ashtray with a cigar butt in it, a stopwatch, and an empty glass. All had the major's fingerprints on them. The stopwatch was still running."

"Running?" I frowned at the news. "I wonder why. How long had it been running?"

"I didn't pay attention," Gallagher admitted. "I stopped it and labeled it for prints. We found a couple."

"Just the major's prints? No other?"

"No other," Gretchen confirmed.

"Call Ray Anders," I said. "Ask him if we can use his cabin later today to reenact the crime."

It wasn't a simple thing, especially when we told him we wanted Max there in his cage. That meant Jane had to come, because she was the only one whose commands he obeyed. I wanted Annabel present, too, for her animal expertise, and of course Sheriff Lens was included.

We gathered around five o'clock: Anders and Jane, Sheriff Lens, Rob Gallagher, Annabel, and me. The cabin was as it had been Tuesday morning, except that the broken window was still covered by a sheet of plywood. Anders had carried in Max's cage with some difficulty, and placed it in the alcove off the living room. "How much does Max weigh now?" Annabel asked.

Anders sighed from the obvious effort. "Over fifty pounds. We only hope he's stopped growing. Sometimes they go up to a hundred pounds."

"If Max gets that big, it's off to a zoo with him," Jane promised.

We stood like spectators at the end of the room and Gallagher produced the revolver that had fired the fatal shot. "That better not be loaded," Sheriff Lens observed.

"It's not." Gallagher broke it open and spun the empty cylinder, then handed it to Jane. "Place it on the floor where we found it." She took it to the far end of the room and positioned it about where I'd seen it Tuesday morning. Then she went over to Max's cage and opened the snap lock. I observed that a metal plate around the door prevented Max from reaching through the bars and freeing himself.

Once freed, he hopped to the carpeted floor and left the alcove, entering the living room proper. "I'll fill in for Major Cassell," Anders said. He coaxed Max forward with animal sounds and the promise of a banana. The chimp ignored the revolver and came forward.

"You'd better help him out, Jane," I suggested.

She bent down and retrieved the pistol, holding the handle end

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out to the chimp. He touched it a bit uncertainly and moved away. She placed it on the carpet by his feet and retreated to the far end of the room by Gallagher and her husband. Max stared down at the weapon and finally picked it up by the barrel, peering at it. This went on for some minutes while we stood there, frozen in fascination. Finally Max dropped the weapon to the floor without ever fingering the trigger.

"What will he do now?" Gallagher asked.

"Probably go back to his cage." She raised her voice a bit. "Cage, Max!"

He looked at her, took his banana, and retreated to the cage, pulling the door shut and engaging the snap lock. The performance was over.

"The chimp didn't do it," Gallagher decided.

"Probably not," I agreed. No one spoke the thought that was in all our minds. If Max hadn't done it, that only left Sheriff Lens.

Annabel and I went home after that. I couldn't face another evening with the Sheriff and Vera without any hope to offer them. In bed that night my wife asked, "Can't you do anything to save him, Sam?"

"I don't know. I've been over the case dozens of times in my mind and it always comes out the same way. The killer had to have access to the murder weapon, a motive for killing Cassell, and a method of entering that locked cabin. Or if Cassell let the killer in, a method of leaving the cabin while locking and bolting the door from the inside."

"It was no accident the sheriff turned up there," Annabel said, voice partly muffled by her pillow. "Cassell phoned him about the prowler."

"That's something I don't understand. Did the killer force him to make the call just to lure Sheriff Lens out there?"

Both of us fell asleep before I could answer the question. When I awakened toward dawn I remembered portions of a dream in which a chimpanzee was chasing me with a stopwatch.

I'd neglected my practice far too much that week, and I'd planned to spend all of Friday in the office, but I'd barely arrived when my nurse April informed me that Vera Lens had just called on an urgent matter. I phoned her back at once. "Yes, Vera, what is it?"

"The county committee has asked my husband to withdraw from the race. They're coming out here with the mayor. They believe they can name a replacement in time for Tuesday's election."

"That's foolish, Vera. The ballots are all printed."

"I know, but try telling that to the committee. They think if the sheriff went on the radio tonight and threw his support to a new candidate there'd be a chance."

"Who's the candidate?"

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"Rob Gallagher. He's the acting sheriff and he's a Republican."

"I thought Rob was supporting Ray Anders."

"Things change," she said with a sigh.

"As soon as I finish with the next patient I'll come out," I promised. "We have to do something."

All was confusion at the Lens home when I reached it an hour later. I recognized some of the Republican committee people on the front porch with the sheriff, who didn't look happy. "They want me to drop out, Doc," he said mournfully as I came up the steps.

"I know." I spotted Gallagher out in the yard by himself, staying clear of the sheriff until a decision was made. Leaving the sheriff and the others, I went out to confront him.

"Is this what you had planned all the time, Rob?"

He looked uncomfortable. "I didn't have anything planned. The committee came to me last night, after the word got around that your reenactment at the cabin was a bust."

"It wasn't a bust," I told him, with a bit more confidence than I felt. "I know who killed Major Cassell, and it wasn't the sheriff. I want you to repeat the reenactment."

"I can't do that, Sam. It wouldn't be any different the second time."

"I think it would be. I'll play the murderer myself."

He hesitated, uncertain of what course to follow. "The committee wouldn't go for it."

"Is the mayor here?"

"He's inside."

I found Mayor Tate in the kitchen, cornered by Vera Lens, trying to be firm without offending her. "It's all decided, Sam," he told me. "The party can't go into Tuesday's election with this murder hanging over the sheriff's head."

"We did a reenactment last night—"

"So I heard."

"I want to try it again today and get it right."

"What's the use? Sheriff Lens is dead politically. No one else could have killed Cassell."

"What if it was suicide?"

"The gun was too far away from the body for that."

"But it might have been moved, by Jane Anders's pet chimp."

There was a flicker of doubt on the mayor's face. "You think you can prove that?"

"Give us a chance. After twenty-four years Sheriff Lens deserves that much."

"Can you do it this afternoon? We have to wind it up today. If we announce a new candidate tomorrow, the Democrats will say it's a Halloween prank."

So we returned to the Anders cabin at three that afternoon. On

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the way out I tried to explain the situation to Sheriff Lens, but he wanted no part of it. "Doc, it doesn't matter where the gun was on the floor, or if that chimp happened to move it a few feet away. There were no powder burns on the wound and the gun had been wiped clean. Whatever else happened, it wasn't a suicide."

"You know it and I know it, but I had to plant some sort of doubt in the mayor's mind to give us another chance."

"Just answer me one thing. Do you know how Major Cassell could have been killed in that locked cabin?"

"I think so," I answered, none too sure of it. "But I have to prove it to myself as well as the rest of them."

As promised, I took the part of the killer while Anders once more became Major Cassell. Jane Anders stood by Max's cage, with Sheriff Lens and Vera among the spectators. Rob Gallagher was there, of course, joined now by Mayor Tate. Gallagher had phoned his office to have Gretchen bring out the ashtray and stopwatch.

With everything in position, I began to speak. "I believe the killer phoned Major Cassell on Monday night or the early hours of Tuesday morning with a suggestion for the campaign. Cassell was expecting the killer and that's why he was fully dressed at that early hour. The plan was that he'd call Sheriff Lens at home before daybreak to report a prowler, requesting the sheriff himself respond. Then they would time his response with this stopwatch. If he didn't come personally, or if he took some time to reach the scene, it could be used as evidence that his age was slowing him down."

"I'd never use something like that," Ray Anders insisted. "It's such a low tactic it would probably lose me as many votes as it gained."

"I agree, but the killer didn't intend ever to use it. The purpose was to lure the sheriff out here where he could be framed for Cassell's murder."

"All right," Anders said, going to the phone. "Assume that I've made the call."

I pressed the stem of the stopwatch and set it on the table. "While they waited the killer walked over to the cage and let Max out. There was no time to lose because the sheriff could drive out here in twenty minutes or less. The killer produced the revolver and fired one shot into Major Cassell's head. The gun was wiped clean and dropped on the carpet and the windows were checked to make sure all were latched from the inside. Then the killer made that muffled call to the operator, also reporting a prowler, so a deputy would be sent to the scene shortly after the sheriff arrived. The killer left by the only door, locking it with a key."

I did exactly that, having borrowed Anders's key to the cabin. I stood outside the door and called out in a loud voice, "Knob, Max!"

Nothing happened.

I called again and still nothing. I unlocked the door and went

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back inside. "I thought you'd established that Max didn't fire that gun," Jane Anders said.

I swung the door closed. "Tell him, Jane."

"This is foolish."

"Tell him. He only responds to your voice."

She looked to her husband for support, but he was only staring at her, wide-eyed. "You have to say it, Jane," he told her finally. "Just to prove he's wrong."

She took a deep breath and said it. "Knob, Max."

The chimpanzee bounded across the cabin to the door, reached up, and turned the knob of the bolt. Then he retreated to his cage and closed the door.

Jane Anders collapsed crying into her husband's arms.

I explained it all later, as much as anyone can ever explain the pressures that drive a person to murder. "We know Major Cassell worked as a lobbyist for Jane's father, Finian Brophy. And Brophy told me he'd been accused of bribery in connection with his work for the state's tobacco industry. The investigation was ongoing, and I suspect Cassell was about to implicate Brophy to save his own skin. Brophy arranged for him to work on the campaign here, but that wasn't enough. I think Jane wanted to protect her father from criminal charges, even if it meant killing Cassell. She worked it out so the killing would serve a double purpose—protecting her father and getting her husband elected sheriff."

"What made you suspect her, Doc?" the sheriff asked.

"During our first reenactment, Gallagher asked her to place the revolver on the floor where they found it. She did so, almost exactly, but how could she have known where it was found? She told me the gun had been removed by the time she went to the cabin to retrieve Max. That got me thinking about her, and about why the stopwatch was still running when Gallagher arrived. If Cassell had been tricked into timing something like your arrival, it would explain the phone call. The use of the revolver from your office safe pointed to a past or present employee, in this case a former deputy's wife. She must have been there with Anders sometime when the safe was open and took the gun without his knowledge."

"Why do you say that?"

"If he knew she had it, he'd have known she was the killer. I don't think he knew that. Remember, he spent Monday night in Shinn Corners, so she was alone at their house."

The news of Jane's arrest was devastating to Anders's campaign. He offered to withdraw, but with the ballots already printed the election went ahead. Sheriff Lens was reelected overwhelmingly. It was the same day that news reached us of Montgomery's victory at El Alamein. The future looked brighter. ●

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LEDGERS

by Neil Schofield

When we talk about film, we tend to focus only on the entertainment end of the business. Writer Neil Schofield made his early career as a writer/producer of "industrial theater"—i.e. films for sales conferences and product launches. Later he wrote and produced tourist projects such as "The Tower of London Experience." In 1999 he decided to move into the world of fiction, and has since produced many wonderful satirical stories such as this one. ¶

Twelve stories isn't much. No, come *on*. You hear all the time about people falling off the first rung of a stepladder, cracking their skull on the corner of the dishwasher, and dying three days later of a subdural hematoma. You can step off the curb, two inches if it's that, and lurch into the path of a truck or a bus and crunch, splat, bye-bye. Two inches is all it takes.

So, twelve stories isn't much. Do the sums. A story is, what, let's take a low figure, say thirteen feet per, allowing for all the bits in between, so that's thirteen times twelve, three twos are six, a hundred and sixty-some feet, allowing for the first floor where the lobby is much higher. A stunt man wouldn't think twice about that. A stunt man could do that on his head. Piece of cake.

No, twelve stories isn't much. It's not how high it is, it's what you're going to do with it that counts. And if you're not going to do anything with it except look at it, well then, that's all right, isn't it?

That was what Milton Grice had been telling himself up to the moment that he opened the window of his office, squeezed the first half of his body through the narrow opening, and put his right foot out there onto the ledge.

He looked back into the cosily familiar office. It was, you had to admit, sparsely furnished, but it had been his home for comfortable months. There was his desk, there were the shelves of books, over a hundred precious cashbooks which he had conscientiously and immaculately kept for Mrs. Hardisty, his employer. His latest employer. Mrs. Hardisty was a professional charity organiser. She

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was in sole control of something approaching a hundred benevolent organisations covering a bewildering range of good deeds. From the orphaned babies of Lesotho to the homeless of Rumania, from the distressed gentlefolk of the English Home Counties to the shipwrecked boat people of Shanghai, everything and everyone, it seemed, was under the all-seeing eye of Mrs. Hardisty and received the same gentle attentions. She had an enormous network of friends who ran events, placed collections boxes, organised flag days, held coffee mornings, bullied their rich friends into giving donations. And this was the nerve centre, where Milton had kept his books. No computer nonsense for Mrs. Hardisty. She didn't trust computers, she had told Milton. She liked ruled lines and columns and neatly written rows of figures. That was just fine by Milton, and so for many months he had sat in this one small office, and entered in his beautiful hand the sums of money which people gave to the Orphaned Babies of Lesotho or Distressed British Gentlewomen and so many others. He thought now, with a stab of regret, of sweet, frail old Mrs. Hardisty, who had put so much trust in him, and who would undoubtedly be very disappointed in him. The beginnings of a wave of guilt swept through him, but he brushed it brutally aside, summoned up his courage, and stepped Out.

Out of the office, which was after all a *place,* and onto the ledge, which was a *non-place.* Just a foot of concrete and steel wall and look at the difference it makes. You might be miles away.

His first real thought, on bringing the rest of him outside, was: Well, well, there's quite a breeze out here. His second thought, as he levered the rest of himself onto the cornice, was that he should have worn a woolly. His mother had always been very keen on woollies as a general cure for what ails you. In fact, in Mrs. Grice's mind, woollies prevented *anything* from ailing you; they fought off viruses, microbes, bankruptcy, debt, and the Devil. She was always wearing woollies, his mother. That was probably because most of the time the rest of her clothing consisted of a sequined body stocking and little else.

His third thought was that this ledge wasn't anywhere near as wide as he had thought it was. It was deeper than the length of his shoes, say a foot and a half, a foot and three quarters. Not worryingly narrow, but not a place you'd want to live. Well, that was all right, because he wasn't going to be there long. He arranged himself against the wall, heels hard against the granite, hands flat, shoulders and head back. He looked down. There wasn't any to-ing and fro-ing yet. People were just going about their normal daily business. But sooner or later, somebody would glance up wondering if it was going to rain and they'd see him. Or they'd

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look up wondering if it was going to stay fine like this all day, and they'd see him. And then it would start.

The breeze from the river was really quite chilly, despite the sunshine. He had watched the weather forecast the night before. They had said it would remain fine with high pressure all day. Some light cumulus towards the evening. He looked up to see if the promised light cumulus had arrived. Tilting his head back automatically pushed his shoulders away from the granite wall, and that gave him a feeling of falling, and that made him overreact and drop his head and push his shoulders back and *that* made him sway forward a little, which didn't worry him.

Vertigo was one of the few things from which Milton had never suffered. His earliest memories were of sitting on the shoulders of his mother, who was in turn standing on the shoulders of his father, who was standing on a wire sixty feet above the sawdust arena in The Great Turbigo Circus. His father and mother and he comprised the death-defying act proudly called The Daring Grissinis, which included him until Milton got too heavy for his mother. After that, his parents gave up on him, since he showed no interest in Indian clubs or being shot out of a cannon, and he was left to roam. Where he roamed most of all was to the caravan where Mrs. Turbigo gave out tickets and took the money and kept the books, a part of the circus which fascinated him much more than all that leaping about. He loved to watch her count the takings, piling up the notes with the edges all neatly squared off, piling up the coins in beautiful little columns. He watched it for hours, sometimes, until Mrs. Turbigo got tired of him sitting watching and sent him off with a smarting rear end. He had realized quite early on that this gypsy life of sawdust and spangles, tinny music, and jumpy, bendy people was not for him. What he wanted to do was pile coins into neat columns, riffle notes, and make neat entries in a cashbook.

By the time he was twelve, he had convinced himself that, on the day of his birth, gypsies had come and stolen away his real parents and left these weird people in their place.

And at the age of sixteen, despite his somewhat spotty schooling record, he ran away from the circus. He went to his grandparents' house to announce that from then on he was living with them, and he got a job as an office boy with a firm of accountants. Which is why—with various in-betweens—he was out on the ledge keeping his eyes fixed on the office building across the street, a featureless twenty-story number which housed an insurance company.

Where, hooray, apparently they had spotted him, because the normally serene office on *their* twelfth floor was now clearly abuzz, people running about. But wait a minute, no one was looking across at him. They were all running to the end of their offices

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along to his left where they could see into the side-street flanking Milton's building.

He looked down again. Yes, there we were, something must be going on in the street round the corner, because people were running to the intersection to his left, and there gathering in a crowd. He could hear the sound of sirens. Well, dammit, this was a nuisance. He hadn't counted on a street accident. He wished somebody, just one of all those people down there, would get on with it and see *him.*

The trouble was, and this was something he'd never even thought about, you see, the rear of a human being isn't flat. You've got your shoulders and you've got, most of all, your buttocks. And if your buttocks are rounded like Milton's after years of sitting on office chairs, the effect is, when you are pressed against a granite wall twelve floors up, bizarre. If you want to keep both buttocks and shoulders pressed against the wall, you end up with a sort of uncomfortable bowing effect. And that's very tiring. Try it.

So Milton decided to move, partly to ease the cramp, and partly to find out what the hell was going on in Orchard Street. He began to shuffle, sideways obviously, to his left, his shoes grating on the granite cornice, his hands flat against that curiously granular surface. The only window between him and the corner was the office of International Winch Maintenance. He didn't know what they did in there or even if they did it anymore. He had had one glimpse, months ago, of a gnarled woman who darted out of the office, and since then nothing, no people, no lights, no telephones.

As he shuffled past the darkened window of International Winch Maintenance, the breeze became seriously cold and he cursed himself for not having thought of that woolly. He glanced at the building across the way, and *there we are.* They'd seen him. A large number of the people who'd run *that* way, to his left to the corner window of their office, as though someone had tilted the building suddenly, were now running *this* way, as though the same whimsical someone had tilted the building the other way. They were staring at him and pointing. Pointing? Why were they pointing? Why did people always point? You didn't have to point something out to someone who was standing two inches away. You're looking in the same direction, for God's sake. Nobody's going to miss a slightly tubby man—no, let's say portly—edging his way along the twelfth-floor cornice on the building across the street.

Anyway, it was now only a matter of time. But it was cold. Perhaps he would have done better to try the sleeping pills again. Or the toilet and razor. But it was too late now and he had a good feeling about this. It was going to work. It *had* to work.

The crowd at the intersection had also redirected their atten-

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tion, he saw. Now they were looking up in his direction and moving. At last.

He had started to edge a little further to his left towards the corner of the building, when, round that very corner, came a hand. The hand gripped the corner for a moment and then, very slowly, it was followed by its owner, who very cautiously negotiated the turn until he was fully on Milton's territory.

Milton stared at him in disbelief. The stranger was a perfectly ordinary-looking man in a light tan suit, a pale yellow shirt, and a neatly knotted tie. He was in his forties, perhaps, with thinning, mousey hair.

He looked at Milton with mild surprise.

"Oh. Hello," he said.

"What are you *doing?*" asked Milton. This was dreadful, this was going to spoil everything.

"Keeping them confused," said the stranger.

"What?"

"They're blowing up a great big airbag round there. I gave them time to get it all set up before I moved. Keeps them on their toes. It'll take them a bit to let it down and move it round here. Then I'll move again."

Milton was very, very angry. He had forgotten the cold and the discomfort.

"You can't come here. This is my ledge." Even to him the words sounded a little silly.

"Don't be ridiculous. And don't be so selfish."

"Get off my ledge," said Milton.

"Oh," said the other man, smiling, "I will. Eventually. Tell you what, we could go together, if you like."

"I'm not going anywhere," said Milton.

"So why are you out here, then?" This was a reasonable question, which Milton didn't feel like answering.

There was a slight pause. Milton looked down. Yes, there they were at last. There were at least three fire engines—why *three?*—and innumerable police cars, Special Patrol Group units, and command-control vans that had all moved round the building onto his side. Barriers were busily being set up to control what was looking like a good-sized crowd. The stranger looked down there as well.

"High, isn't it?"

"This is the twelfth story," Milton said with immense patience considering the circumstances. "They have to put the twelfth story up high. That's the way it works. It's the law," he added inaccurately.

Across the street, he could see that the people in the offices opposite had now settled themselves comfortably to watch. They

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had drawn up chairs to the windows and one of the girls was going round with a tray of coffee.

The man turned to him and said, "My name's Eric. What's yours?"

It seemed churlish not to answer this harmless question.

"Milton," said Milton.

"Pleased to meet you, Milton," said Eric, and held his right hand out sideways. Milton kept his eyes fixed on the offices across the road and ignored the hand. He wasn't going to shake hands with a would-be suicide twelve stories up, thank you *very* much.

This was going to wreck the whole scheme. He hadn't counted on this, how could he have? What he had counted on was one quietish fire engine, two or three policemen, and a police psychiatrist, and being talked back in. And now look. It was like the circus. This wasn't going to work. He'd have to go back in. Perhaps he should try the sleeping pills again, even though it meant that dreadful stomach-pump business.

No, no, no, wait a minute, if he went back in now, with the whole place abuzz with far too many police, firemen, who knew what else, this other person, this *Eric* would still be out here, taking all the attention. Who was going to come looking for Milton in the lavatory? No one.

He clenched his fists. There was only one thing for it. This Eric person was going to have to come in, too. Then, after the fuss had settled down, he could think about it again. Come out on the ledge a second time, perhaps. That wasn't too bad an idea, at that. The trauma of saving the life of a jumper could easily push Milton over some mental edge, couldn't it? Totally understandable. Then they could talk him in, take him off to the clinic, and the rest could go as planned.

Well. What else did he have?

He looked down again at the street, now awash with what appeared to be quite a good house. There were ladder trucks, no really, twelve stories, dream on. There were lots more police, and there were now the really serious support teams: ice-cream, cold-drinks, and hot-dog vendors had set up, and there were other merchants, easily recognisable even from here by their shiny balding heads and Hawaiian shirts or Senegalese tribal robes, who were circulating offering their merchandise.

Eric was looking down there, too.

"T-shirts seem to be doing well," he said.

T-shirts? How could they be already selling T-shirts? They must be all-purpose models. *Jump.* And *Don't Jump.* And *John and Yoko Live.* Whatever they had in stock.

Milton looked across at the office opposite, where, incidentally, a lot of people seemed to be wearing T-shirts now, of what persuasion he couldn't make out. A Jumper Day over there seemed to be

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automatically classed as a Dress-Down Day.

He looked to his right. Ah. There they were. There were heads and shoulders peering out from his office window. Heads surmounting uniform shirts and ties. He gave them a reassuring wave. *Get back. It's all right. We're talking.*

He looked back at Eric, who was gazing skywards.

Eric said, "Have to be moseying along soon, pardner."

What was he talking about?

"What are you talking about?" Milton said.

"They'll be abseiling down soon, with nets and ropes," said Eric. "They must have let down the airbag by now. I'm off back round the other side."

He started to shuffle sideways away from Milton.

"Don't go," said Milton desperately, "stay here with me."

Eric looked at him oddly. The breeze from the river was riffling his thinning hair.

"What?" he said.

"Stay with me. Talk to me."

Eric's face creased into a puzzled smile.

"Two minutes ago you couldn't wait to get rid of me. Well, now, I'm off." He took another shuffling pace away from Milton.

"No. Don't do that. I need to talk."

Eric said, "No, you don't, Milton. That's the mistake everybody makes. You don't need to talk. Talking only causes problems. All the problems in the world are caused by talking. Keep it to yourself is my advice."

Milton plunged desperately into some ledge-side psychology.

"Perhaps it's not talking that caused your problems. I assume you have problems?"

"Oh, I have problems all right," said Eric. "I have problems like other people have crab grass."

"Well, tell me. What problems?"

Eric turned his head to face him. "You really want to know?"

"Yes," said Milton, "I really do." He really didn't, but this was the only way he could think of to get the man off the ledge so he, Milton, could go about his lawful business. He had to keep this idiot talking.

He stuck his hand in his trouser pocket.

"Cigarette?" he said, pulling out a packet of Camels.

Eric shook his head. "Milton," he said, "those things will kill you."

Milton looked around at the twelve-story landscape, at the heaving crowds in the street. He couldn't believe what he was hearing.

"Eric. Take a look around you. Have a cigarette."

Eric took one. Milton took out his trusty Bic lighter and edged a little closer, holding it in his cupped hands. Eric leaned forward

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and lit his cigarette, then leaned back again. There was a collective sigh, audible even from here, from the audience. The release of tension down there seemed to provoke a flurry of buying of dogs and drinks and T-shirts. And it even seemed to relax the policemen and firemen, who stopped running up and down so much and simply watched. Milton was, it seemed, in charge here.

Milton lit his own cigarette and looked at Eric, who leaned back against the wall. He seemed to have no buttocks problem, Milton noted enviously.

"It's a banal enough story, I suppose." Eric said. "I'm a thief."

Milton immediately felt warmer towards him. "What sort of thief? A bank robber?"

"Look at me, Milton," said Eric. "No, nothing as dashing as that. I simply stole other people's money. It's easy enough if you're a bank manager. Too easy, actually."

"Why did you do it?"

"Oldest story in the world. And the silliest. I thought that if I could spend enough money on her, I could prevent my wife from leaving me. You'd think an intelligent man would know better, wouldn't you? But then, intelligence is no guarantee against stupidity. And despite all the holidays, the sports car I bought her, the jewelry, she left anyway. With an insurance salesman. No one at the bank knows anything yet, but they will. So, no job, no family, no home, no money, no nothing. I'll certainly go to prison. And I'm too old to start out afresh, too old to get a regular job, too tired to even think about starting afresh. I think that's all. Is that enough? Can I go now?" said Eric, tapping ash into the void.

"You think that suicide is better than anything that can happen to you from now on until the end of your life?"

"Pretty much," said Eric.

Milton leaned back and took a drag on his cigarette. He'd tried to give up many times, unable to see what was the earthly point in sticking money into your face and setting fire to it. But it was true, damn, it tasted good, did tobacco.

"Let me tell you about starting out afresh," he said to Eric. "It's a true story."

"Oh, goody, I like stories," said Eric, "especially good-night stories."

"Just listen. It may help you get things in perspective."

"Go ahead," said Eric. "I doubt it, but go ahead."

So Milton told Eric a story.

It was the story of a boy who had run away from the circus to become an accountant. Run away from all those jumpy, leaping folk with their sequined suits and their weird cries and their physically lethal, intellectually pointless, self-imposed ordeals on ropes, wires, unlikely chrome structures, or giant rubber balls accompanied or not by seals and dogs.

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"Ran away from the circus?" said Eric. "It starts well, I must say."

"If you're going to interrupt all the time," said Milton waspishly, "we're not going to get anywhere and they'll be abseiling down to get you."

They both looked upwards to where at the moment the skyline was free of abseiling, beetle-browed, ski-masked Special Forces thugs, but was not free of two network helicopters, with cameramen hanging perilously out at a thousand feet shooting their situation for live TV, minute-by-minute, as it happened, right after this.

"Smile, Milton," said Eric, "you're on air."

Milton went on.

This boy, in the best Horatio Alger tradition, went to live with his grandparents, took a menial post in an accountancy firm, and proceeded to claw and climb up the ladder from mere office boy to office assistant, working far into the night over his books, eschewing all distraction, refusing the blandishments of his fellows to come and drink hard liquor in flashy bars in the company of loose women. And eventually, this boy, despite all the odds, succeeded in passing all the accountancy exams going, summa cum laude.

"Can you stop saying *'this boy,'* please," said Eric mildly. "It's beginning to get on my nerves. It reminds me of Sunday School, when they told us about the boy who left home cursing his mother and father, and who was found dead in a well not two hundred yards from his home. If I remember rightly," he added, "the mother of that boy never smiled again."

Well, Milton told him, the mother of *this* boy had found it hard to summon up a grin when she heard the news. It was the shame that got to her. That the scion of one of the oldest-established funambulist families in the land should come to this, should give up this gay life of sawdust, music, sequins, and romance to become a bean-counter. It may well have been that shame that made her tremble and lose concentration one night at the climax of the Daring Grissinis act when she was poised on one foot (ONE!!) atop the now balding (and hence slippery) pate of her conjunct, who himself was riding a ten-foot unicycle across the wire with seventy feet of nothing between him and the sawdust ring.

It was a fitting end to yet another circus legend, everybody agreed, as the rich loam received Dabney and Muriel, the Daring Grissinis. That's how they would have wanted to go, everyone said. Milton knew that, on the contrary, the way his parents would have wanted to go would have been in bed with a bottle of whisky, a Domino's Four Seasons pizza, and a rerun of *The Magnificent Seven.*

But you can't have everything.

The spirit of the Grissinis would live on, everyone told him, in him, in Milton Grice, Accountant.

More than they knew, actually.

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After years of number-crunching, bean-counting, and dogsbodying for others (because in the Great Game that is Accounting there is no room for the pusillanimous: What is asked of the youthful recruit is sweat and blood, tears, and any other bodily secretions available), this boy—sorry—this man rose through the ranks until he was a junior partner with a Fine Old Firm, handling the accountancy affairs of many great and good clients. He was their trusted advisor, their counsellor, their guide through the hell pits and the sulphur mines which await the unwary feet of those who have Money.

"Is there much more of this?" asked Eric. "I only ask because it's getting late and my knees are getting tired. And I've got things to do. Well—*a* thing."

Milton's knees were also getting tired of being locked in the same position, but he ploughed on.

One day, he told Eric, the gene which he thought had perished with his parents, but which had apparently mutated into something quite else, sprang wild-eyed and gibbering from a thicket of Milton's DNA. The Beast was loose, and its name was I Dare You.

In the grip of a compulsion that he could only compare to bloodlust, Milton took the first step out on his own high wire, far higher than the one his father had trodden. Or cycled, rather. He was absolutely compelled to draw a check on one of his many client trust accounts, that of Mrs. Biggins, a hideously wealthy and decomposing widow whose income equalled that of many a small Third World country. He drew the check, which he was entitled to do, signed it, which he was not, and forged the signature of the senior partner, which he was certainly not entitled to do. And as he did it, he felt as he imagined his father must have felt, stepping out on that wobbly wire with no safety net. It was *wonderful.*

"How much?" asked Eric, interested.

"A hundred thousand."

"You embezzled a hundred thousand? That's not very much."

It was good enough to be getting on with, and anyway Milton hadn't embezzled the money. There was nothing of self-interest in this reckless action. He simply wanted to make the money grow. And grow.

"And what did this boy do with the hundred thousand?"

Well, what he did was, he invested it. Disastrously. A friend of his, no, an acquaintance of his, because it turned out that he was no friend, who was a vice-president of a construction company which was doing very nicely, thank you, had offered to sell Milton part of his holding in the company. Milton bought. And the very next week, the financial columns had headlined the flight of this very same vice-president for parts unknown, leaving giant black holes in the company accounts. The shares plummeted. One day

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there was a hundred thousand and the next, there was nothing. Mrs. Biggins's money had simply evaporated.

The shame, the shock of the loss, and the realisation of what he had done drove Milton to put an end to his days. He locked himself in one of the office men's rooms with a bottle of vodka and a bottle of sleeping pills.

Luckily, a sharp-witted colleague discovered him and raised the alarm. Milton was taken off to hospital where doctors thoroughly pumped his stomach and a visiting psychiatrist thoroughly pumped his mind.

Halfway through all this pumping, the Very Most Senior partner of the Fine Old Firm came to visit. He was sorry to learn of Milton's problems, he said, and sorrier to learn of the unfortunate and unaccountable black hole in Mrs. Biggins's accounts. God knows how it had happened, he said, and it went without saying that of course the Fine Old Firm would make good. Milton thought this was really excellent news. But along with this good news came the simple request that he leave the firm without fuss. The Fine Old Firm hated fuss. He would be paid his salary up to the end of the year, in order that he might recover from his breakdown in comfort with no financial worries which might provoke a relapse. Conditional upon his leaving quietly, he would be supplied with the highest and most glowing of references.

So he left. He convalesced for the better part of six months before his shrinking funds told him it was time to seek work.

He found a job with another accounting firm—a little lower on the ladder. This was no Fine Old Firm. In fact, despite the glowing references, the word seemed to have gone round the FOFs that Milton was—not to put too fine a point on it—unreliable.

But it was a good, big, hardworking firm, nonetheless, with some high-class clients, and lots and lots of healthy, profitable, bread-and-butter due-diligence work.

"You didn't do it again?" said Eric. He really was interested now, Milton saw. He had forgotten the situation.

"I couldn't help it," said Milton, "it's stronger than me."

The moment he had access to a client's trust account, Milton invested two hundred thousand in a start-up that was floating on the NASDAQ exchange with a really inviting opening share price. It was a reasonable chance.

Milton bought his shares as the NASDAQ Index hovered around the 4000 mark and just, *just* moments before the pin hit the bubble.

Milton managed to conceal his folly and the gaping hole in his client's account for three months, until the moment when he realised that the NASDAQ, now slinking furtively around 2000, was never going to come back, and that a start-up selling used shoes on the Internet had never been a starter. That moment of

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realisation came as he read a particularly vicious *Wall Street Times* exposé. His colleagues, who knew nothing of the background, simply saw a chubby accountant begin to cry right there in the main office in the middle of a working day. Milton rushed to his desk, pulled out a cut-throat razor from a drawer, and headed at a dead run for the men's room.

He was wrestled roughly to the ground by several burly colleagues (foolhardy, too, seeing that he was brandishing an open razor) and was shipped off to the very same clinic, where he was heavily tranquilized and where the staff psychiatrist was interested to see him again. He remained heavily medicated and heavily counselled until someone from the firm came to see him. This time, it was no senior partner; it was the office manager, a brutal man with Neanderthal brows and jaw, with whom Milton had never managed to forge a loving friendship.

This man threw an envelope on Milton's bed.

"If it was up to me, Grice," he said, his pale blue eyes surveying Milton's face, "you'd be going down for this. But those ninnies back there are petrified of a scandal, so you're walking. You're paid up to the end of the week. Don't come back. Ever."

"Interesting," said Eric. "They were frightened."

Absolutely terrified, Milton said. When it came to a fight between the Desire for Revenge and Fear of Scandal, Fear won on points.

The breeze off the river was really picking up now. Milton wished he had worn a jacket for this, as Eric sensibly had. He looked round and saw there were still heads poking out from the windows of his office. He gave them a reassuring sign, index finger and thumb forming a circle: *It's going okay. It's going just great. No need for the abseilers.* The nearest face, a strong, reassuring face surmounting a blue uniform shirt and black tie, nodded.

He turned back to Eric, who was staring down into the street.

"Did you see that?" Eric said. "Some bastard on rollers just stole a woman's handbag. Really, you can't trust anyone."

Milton's legs were aching appallingly. He hadn't reckoned on this: The effect of standing stock-still for a sustained length of time, without the opportunity to stretch or bend your legs, was extremely painful.

"We really have got a nice day for it," said Eric, turning his face up into the sun. "Oh, sorry, Milton, you were saying? I'm finding it really interesting. So did this go on, this bizarre compulsion of yours?"

Bet your life it went on. Several times, in fact. But with increasing difficulty, because each time his choice of jobs was more limited, word inevitably percolating down to the lower substrata of the accounting world.

But he had a go, gave it a stab whenever he could. And the last

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time, a fairly pathetic twenty-thousand plunge into Vivendi Universal had seen him fairly definitively on the streets.

"You don't seem to learn very much, I must say," Eric said. "But, my God, you've got perseverance. I'd have given up the game long before you. But then, I suppose you're in the grip of a rogue gene."

"Don't do that, please," said Milton, watching with dismay as Eric leaned over the horrid void as if measuring the distance. "Eric, it's what I've been trying to tell you. You can always come back. Where there's life, there's hope. It's always darkest before the dawn."

Eric smiled at him. "For a slightly overweight embezzler, Milton, you do have quite a collection of mottos. Not that they seem to have done you much good."

"I'm still here, aren't I?" said Milton.

"You haven't told me why," Eric reminded him.

Milton told him why.

After his last desperate flailings, he had found himself, to all intents and purposes, unemployable. His career, like that of his father and mother before him, went into free fall. The bush telegraph seemed to have been drumming away, and despite the quality of his CV and his qualifications, he had to accept that nobody wanted him. He was reduced to moonlighting: doing, let's say, *creative* audits for not-quite-dishonest small businessmen.

And it was one of those not-quite-dishonest businessmen, a man called Bert Pance, who had told him about Mrs. Hardisty.

Mrs. Hardisty, apparently, ran a whole raft of charities, and had need of someone to keep the books. Why Mrs. Hardisty couldn't do like everyone else and advertise, instead of broadcasting on the grapevine, Milton didn't bother to ask. He telephoned Mrs. Hardisty and the very same afternoon he went to see her.

She had a large house, did Mrs. Hardisty, with many rooms, packed with precious and valuable objects. She was a tiny woman, with a delicately sweet face and snow-white hair. Her hands were long and much be-ringed. She did, Milton found, wear outfits that were a little too loud for her age or his taste, but what did that matter? She welcomed him warmly and gave him a glass of warm sherry.

She told him about her network of charities, and about the large amounts of donations that flooded in every day. Usually in cash. And there was the problem, she told Milton. It needed a person who could organise, keep books, control this inflow of money. And outflow, too, because Mrs. Hardisty's organisation regularly handed out checks to fund the purchase of tents, clothing, food, and water pumps, or to provide for interest-free loans, grants, what-have-you to the lucky Lesotho babies or the distressed gentlefolk.

Milton was offered and took the job. He set up shop in the twelfth-story office of Mrs. Hardisty's organisation, with its sparse

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furnishings and its steel-lined door ("For your security, dear," as Mrs. Hardisty had sweetly told him).

It was undemanding work but hard, and it just never stopped. All day, people would come in with money. In briefcases, plastic bags, cardboard boxes, they would deliver their haul of bundles of crumpled notes to Milton, saying, very often in a thick foreign accent, "Lesotho Babies" or "Dominican Flood Relief" or "Medicines for Mindanao" or whatever it was. Milton's job was to help count this money, which might be, variously, the proceeds of a spelling bee, a sponsored fun-run, a garage sale, or whatever. That wasn't hard, although he had to wash his hands several times a day, particularly after handling the proceeds of a cake-bake. Milton would hand over a receipt. Then, he would take the money, in minutely-defined amounts, load it into the airline pilot's bag which Mrs. Hardisty had provided, and place it in any of a hundred different accounts in thirty banks around the city.

The other half of his job was to write out the checks for the construction companies who were building little dams somewhere, or the clothing-supply companies or the tenting companies or the baby-food companies. And also there was a lot of inter-charity business. Apparently, if Lesotho Babies were a bit strapped for cash, Medicines for Mindanao would give them an interest-free loan, just like that, and vice versa. Sometimes, and confusingly, vice versa on the same day.

Milton found the work strange but emotionally rewarding. He was doing something to help the needy of the world. And after a few flying visits, Mrs. Hardisty left him to get on with it.

"Mistake," said Eric. He seemed to be oblivious now of the crowds in the street, the ledge, everything.

"Yes," said Milton.

Because one fine afternoon, Milton felt once more the urgent need to make this money multiply.

"What was it this time?"

This time, the same Bert Pance who had introduced him to Mrs. Hardisty came up with an intriguing investment opportunity. Some friends of his, he said, were looking for business partners in a venture which involved importing some bales of produce from where he didn't say, destined for where he didn't say either.

What sort of produce, Milton wanted to know. Pance didn't say, except to admit that it was vegetable in origin. But any financial involvement would reap a hundred percent profit.

That was for Milton. He could hardly wait to deliver a pilot's bag of freshly-counted notes to Pance and his friends, who appeared to favour a disused fruit warehouse as their venue of choice. He handed over the money and went away to wait. He waited and waited, and was eventually contacted by Pance's lawyer. It was

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very nice of Pance to think of him in the midst of the tribulations which were besetting him, Milton thought.

The news was that the bales of vegetable produce had been seized by police and Customs in the dead of night, which is when they were being imported. And that Milton should go away for a short holiday, if possible. But he should, in any case, forget all about Pance, the lawyer said.

Eric was gazing off into the distance. "Dear, oh dear. Back in the soup again. So the reason you're here is to be talked back in, shipped off to a clinic, and then, after a while, you'll be off on your merry way."

"The moral being," said Milton as earnestly as he knew how, "that you can always make a new start. No matter how desperate things may look, there is always a way out."

His legs really were getting painful now.

Eric thought for a bit, staring down into the street. "What you're saying is that if they're convinced you've had a breakdown, they'll sweep it under the carpet?"

Milton nodded eagerly. "They're terrified of a scandal now," he said, "they'll do anything rather than let rumours get out. Unless it's in the millions or the billions, they'll keep it quiet."

Eric leaned back and looked at the sky. "I like your system, Milton. It interests me enormously. What do you do in the clinic? A fair amount of babbling, I suppose."

"Not really," Milton said, "it's whatever works for you. I tend to pluck feebly at the bedclothes. And I keep saying 'I don't know' a lot."

He let his head loll sideways and crooned, in a high, scratchy voice: *"Idon'tknowIdon'tknowIdon'tknow."* He straightened his head and looked at Eric. "Like that. It seems to rattle them."

Eric looked for a long time into the street, where some of the crowd were losing interest. Several of the more professional gawpers were beginning to drift away in search of fresher meat. He smiled. And then he laughed.

"It's ridiculous. But no more than anything else in my life. Let's go in."

Milton let out an involuntary sigh of relief, a sort of reverse gulp.

He turned to his right, where the heads were still poking out of his window.

"Coming in," he called. Then he turned back to Eric. "Coming?" he said.

Side by side they began to shuffle along the ledge. This startled the crowd below into a spattering of applause. There was, regrettably, some scattered booing. Police and firemen began to wrap it up.

Milton reached his window. The man with his head still poking out looked at him.

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"That was a very brave and human act you just performed," he said.

Milton said, "I think the best thing is if I go past and let him come in first." The man nodded. He had a squarish head and an efficient, humorous look to his mouth.

Milton shuffled past the window and watched as Eric was helped over the high frame. Eric looked back at him briefly.

"Pluck feebly at the bedclothes and no babbling. Thanks, Milton," he said, "and good luck."

Milton nodded. Then he edged in his turn to the window and grasped the frame. The man in uniform was there. He took Milton's wrist.

"That was very brave of you," he said, "outstandingly courageous."

Milton began to heave himself onto the window frame.

"Oh," he said, in what he hoped was a modest tone, "it wasn't too difficult."

Behind this man, Milton could see Eric being ushered out of the office by the other man, who seemed to be a very wide person, presumably to be gathered into the arms of other police and firemen. Then the door was closed again.

"I must admit it was getting chilly out there," Milton said, now lifting his second leg to kneel on the frame. He had abandoned the idea of going out there a second time and was already cobbling together a new scenario, involving parking his car very visibly outside Mrs. Hardisty's house and running a hose from the exhaust. Perhaps it would need a little more refining, but he had the basics and he was quite pleased with it. "I'll be very glad to come back in," he said truthfully.

"Thing is, Milton, about that," said the man, letting go of Milton's wrist. He sounded curiously regretful.

"What?" Milton was concentrating on the window frame. He was just inches from the man's chest, where he couldn't help noticing that what he had taken for a uniform shirt was simply blue silk and that the dark tie sported a nude blonde whose fluorescent breasts were certainly not standard issue. He also saw, past the man, that all his ledgers, his precious cashbooks, had been loaded into cardboard boxes which were standing here and there on the floor.

"Thing is," the man said, with a movement that television audiences would later register as a despairing grab, which it wasn't, "that's why Mrs. H. sent us up in the first place."

Milton thought about that for a bit: about sweet, frail Mrs. Hardisty and all that powdery money; about the Lesotho Babies and the Distressed Gentlefolk; and, rather irrelevantly, about Eric. About the whole thing, in fact. But he had to think quickly because, when you're accelerating at thirty-two feet per second per second, twelve stories really *isn't* much. ●

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Steven E. Steinbock is a freelance writer and religious educator with three nonfiction books in print. He is a lifelong mystery fan and collector of mystery novels and magazines.

A CASE OF COUNTERFEITING:

Cummings & Co.

by Steven E. Steinbock

By now, many readers have had a chance to see the Sony Entertainment/Columbia Pictures movie *Secret Window,* in which Johnny Depp plays a writer (Mort Rainey) chasing after an elusive issue of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.* The issue—June, 1995—serves as a McGuffin, to use Hitchcock's pet term, just as Poe's purloined letter and Hammett's Maltese falcon did before it. In the Stephen King novella on which the movie was based, it was an *EQMM* dated June of 1980, not 1995, but as we'll see, neither King's issue nor the movie's correspond exactly to the magazines that really came off the presses in those months and years, anyway. A sort of counterfeiting was at work, not only in creating a believable semblance of *EQMM* but in devising the film's other props, sets, and locations. I invite you to join me as we see how it was done, how Hollywood, through the creative lens of director David Koepp and production designer Howard Cummings, worked its magic, and produced things that even a sleuth from *Queen's* own Bureau of Investigations could mistake for the real McCoy.

To begin, I tracked down production designer Howard Cummings, whose filmography includes "The Usual Suspects," "The Next Best Thing," and "Death to Smoochy." Since the movie's most important prop is that hard-to-find issue of *EQMM,* my first questions dealt with it.

The stage-prop version of *EQMM* that Mort Rainey finally gets his hands on in the movie has the same cover illustration by Ken Joudrey as the real magazine of June 1995—showing a woman's legs, from the knees down, walking up a flight of stairs wearing red high heels, while a man with a suspicious violin case sneaks up behind her. This image provides a striking contrast in the film when Mort's ex-wife (played by Maria Bello) nearly steps on the magazine as she walks up Rainey's stairs.

I asked Howard Cummings why he chose the June 1995 *EQMM,* and how he found it. "I backed up the story to what year it would have come out," he said. "We looked at some covers, and I liked that one the best. Something about the woman's high heels that I thought seemed to fit. It's a pretty unique magazine, which is another reason I like it. That size is easy to see on a table with other magazines— 'Oh, there's *Ellery Queen.*' And anybody who is into mysteries will automatically know what it is. It's very iconic. And that's what we wanted to say about Mort Rainey as a character."

A close look at the version of the magazine that appears in Mort Rainey's world does show a few subtle changes. The front cover lists a different set of author names, and the back cover was replaced by the

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SPEAKING WITH JOHN TURTURRO

by Steven E. Steinbock

In the Film Secret Window (Sony Entertainment/Columbia Pictures), John Turturro plays the sinister John Shooter, who accuses Mort Rainey (Johnny Depp) of plagiarism. Turturro is a multitalented writer, director, and character actor who starred in Barton Fink, Quiz Show, and other critically acclaimed films. EQMM's Steven Steinbock, a writer who lives in Stephen King country—Maine—was able to chat with Turturro by phone for this exclusive interview.

EQMM: In the character of John Shooter, you created an antagonist who was menacing without being a monster.

TURTURRO: It's really Stephen King who created him. Shooter is a guy who feels he's been wronged, and he wants to have that wrong righted. He pursues his own particular version of justice.

EQMM: So Shooter is all about justice?

TURTURRO: That's how I pursued it. That was very specific in the novella and in the script.

EQMM: Can you tell us anything about Shooter's background?

TURTURRO: He worked on a dairy farm. He sold his dairy farm to a fellow back in Jackson, Mississippi. All the stuff was in the book. I spent a good deal of time down there [during the filming of *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*], so I knew what he was talking about.

EQMM: King also gave Shooter that pilgrim's hat. Did wearing that hat affect your character?

TURTURRO: It was hard to find the right hat. Many of them completely dominated my face. I don't have a really square face, so it's a tough hat for me to wear. But I think we found the right one. We had to have it made. Once you find the right angle on the brim, it gives you something, you know what I mean? It kind of changes your center of gravity or something.

EQMM: [Production Designer] Howard Cummings told us that Shooter is an iconic character just as the magazine is iconic.

TURTURRO: Right. He certainly is. He sees himself as a writer, so he seems to be drawn out of all these images that are in your brain from other stories or movies. He's a man with certain morals and there's a rigidity within that. There are certainly overtones of other things in it, which would be the case if the guy was a writer.

EQMM: Were you familiar with *EQMM* prior to working on the film?

TURTURRO: Yeah. A little bit. My son is big into mysteries. And he really likes Stephen King. I like to go into bookstores, and I had

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looked at a couple of copies that had come out. So that's how I was aware of it.

EQMM: Do you enjoy crime and detective fiction?

TURTURRO: I do. It's not something that would be first on my list. But I like watching it. I really haven't done that much of it. It's very hard to do really well.

EQMM: You mean performing?

TURTURRO: In terms of writing it, too. I really like film noir. I like a lot of the writers who inspired it.

EQMM: Crime seems to run through a lot of your films, such as *To Live and Die in L. A., Clockers, The Big Lebowski,* and even *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

TURTURRO: *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*—I wouldn't necessarily think of that as a crime film. Even though we're on a chain gang, crime isn't the main thing. I've never really done this particular sort of genre before. And I've never done anything adapted from Stephen King.

EQMM: You have worked with Johnny Depp before.

TURTURRO: Yes, on the Sally Potter film, *The Man Who Cried.*

EQMM: And in *The Source,* about the Beat Generation, you played William S. Burroughs and Johnny played Jack Kerouac.

TURTURRO: Oh, right. But we weren't on screen together. Johnny and I know each other and like each other a lot. We have a nice relationship. I'm crazy about Johnny.

EQMM: Right now you're writing and directing *Romance and Cigarettes.* Tell me about that.

TURTURRO: I'm calling it a "savage musical." It's sort of like *The Honeymooners* meet Charles Bukowski via James Brown, Irving Berlin, and Bruce Springsteen. The Coen Brothers are executive producers. It stars James Gandolfini, Susan Sarandon, Kate Winslet, Christopher Walken, Mandy Moore, Aida Turturro, Mary-Louise Parker, and Eddie Izzard. We really wanted Steve Buscemi to do it, but I think that's not going to work out, because he's directing his own movie, too.

EQMM: Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with us. Any final comments?

TURTURRO: I hope Stephen King liked what I did. I haven't seen or spoken to him since we finished. I tried to do his invention, his character justice. It was fun to get into that world. I enjoyed it. And I enjoyed bouncing it off of Johnny. ●

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DEPARTMENT OF FIRST STORIES

ON THE ROCKS

by J. A. Konrath

"She sure bled a lot."

I ignored Officer Coursey, my attention focused on the dead woman's arm. The cut had almost severed her left wrist, a flash of pink bone peeking through. The fingers of her right hand were curled around the handle of a utility knife.

I'd been in Homicide for more than ten years, and still felt an emotional punch whenever I saw a body. The day I wasn't affected was the day I hung up my badge.

I wore disposable plastic booties over my flats, and the shag carpet oozed blood like a sponge wherever I stepped. The apartment's air conditioning was set on freeze, so the decomposition wasn't as bad as it might have been after a week—but it was still pretty bad. I got down on my haunches and swatted away some blowflies.

On her upper arm, six inches above the wound, was a bruise.

"What's so interesting, Lieut? It's just a suicide."

In my blazer pocket I had some latex gloves. I snapped them on.

The victim's name was Janet Hellerman, a real-estate lawyer with a private practice. She was brunette, mid thirties, Caucasian. Her satin slip was mottled with drying brown stains, and she wore nothing underneath. I put my hand on her chin, gently turned her head.

There was another bruise on her cheek.

"Johnson's getting a statement from the super."

I stood up, smoothed down my skirt, and nodded at Herb, who had just entered the room. Detective First Class Herb Benedict

J. A. Konrath's first novel, *Whiskey Sour*, will be released by Hyperion Books in June of 2004. Since this is *EQMM*'s July issue, it's arguable that Mr. Konrath should not be in the Department of First Stories. But since this issue actually goes to newsstands at the end of April, we're claiming first publication. The heroine of this piece, as of the novel, is "Jack" Daniels—like the whiskey. Only *she*'s a Chicago cop. ✝

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was my partner. He had a gray moustache, basset-hound jowls, and a Santa Claus belly. Herb kept on the perimeter of the blood puddle; those little plastic booties were too hard for him to get on.

"Johnson's story corroborates?"

Herb nodded. "Why? You see something?"

I did, but wasn't sure how it fit. Herb had questioned both Officer Coursey and Officer Johnson, and their stories were apparently identical.

Forty minutes ago they'd arrived at apartment 3008 at the request of the victim's mother, who lived out-of-state. She had been unable to get in touch with her daughter for more than a week. The building superintendent unlocked the door for them, but the safety chain was on, and a sofa had been pushed in front of the door to prevent anyone from getting inside. Coursey put his shoulder to it, broke in, and they discovered the body.

Herb squinted at the corpse. "How many marks on the wrist?"

"Just one cut, deep."

I took off the blood-soaked booties, put them in one of the many plastic baggies I keep in my pockets, and went over to the picture window, which covered most of the far wall. The view was expensive, overlooking Lake Shore Drive from forty stories up. Boaters swarmed over the surface of Lake Michigan like little white ants, and the street was a gridlock of toy cars. Summer was a busy time for Chicagoans—criminals included.

I motioned for Coursey, and he heeled like a chastened puppy. Beat cops were getting younger every year; this one barely needed to shave. He had the cop stare, though—hard eyes and a perpetual scowl, always expecting to be lied to.

"I need you to do a door-to-door. Get statements from everyone on this floor. Find out who knew the victim, who might have seen something."

Coursey frowned. "But she killed herself. The only way in the apartment is the one door, and it was locked from the inside, with the safety chain on. Plus there was a sofa pushed in front of it."

"I'm sure I don't need to remind you that suicides are treated as homicides in this town, Officer."

He rolled his eyes. I could practically read his thoughts. *How did this dumb broad get to be Homicide Lieutenant? She sleep with the PC?*

"Lieut, the weapon is still in her hand. Don't you think . . ."

I sighed. Time to school the rookie.

"How many cuts are on her wrist, Coursey?"

"One."

"Didn't they teach you about hesitation cuts at the Academy? A suicidal person usually has to work up the courage. Where was she found?"

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"On the floor."

"Why not her bed? Or the bathtub? Or a comfy chair? If you were ending your life, would you do it standing in the middle of the living room?"

He became visibly flustered, but I wasn't through yet.

"How would you describe the temperature in this room?"

"It's freezing."

"And all she's wearing is a slip. Little cold for that, don't you think? Did you read the suicide note?"

"She didn't leave a note."

"They all leave notes. I've worked these streets for twenty years, and never saw a suicide where the vic didn't leave a note. But for some strange reason, there's no note here. Which is a shame because maybe her note would explain how she got the multiple contusions on her face and arm."

Coursey was cowed, but he managed to mumble, "The door was—"

"Speaking of doors," I interrupted, "why are you still here when you were given an order to start the door-to-door? Move your ass."

Coursey looked at his shoes and then left the apartment. Herb raised an eyebrow.

"Kinda hard on the newbie, Jack."

"He wouldn't have questioned me if I had a penis."

"I think you have one now. You took his."

"If he does a good job, I'll give it back."

Herb turned to look at the body. He rubbed his moustache.

"It could still play as suicide," he said. "If she was hit by a sudden urge to die. Maybe she got some terrible news. She gets out of the shower, puts on a slip, cranks up the air conditioning, gets a phone call, immediately grabs the knife and with one quick slice . . ."

He made a cutting motion over his wrist.

"Do you buy it?" I asked.

Herb made a show of mulling it over.

"No," he consented. "I think someone knocked her out, sliced her wrist, turned up the air so the smell wouldn't get too bad, and then . . ."

I sighed, my shoulders sagging. "Managed to escape from a locked room."

Herb's eyes scanned the view. "A window washer?"

I checked the window, but as expected it didn't open. Winds this high up weren't friendly.

"There's no other way in?" Herb asked.

"Just the one entrance."

I walked up to it. The safety chain hung on the door at eye level, its wall mounting and three screws dangling from the end. The doorframe where it had been attached was splintered and cracked

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from Coursey's entrance. There were three screw holes in the frame that matched the mounting, and a fourth screw still remained, sticking out of the frame about an inch.

The hinges on the door were dusty and showed no signs of tampering. A black leather sofa was pushed off to the side, near the doorway. I followed the tracks that its feet had made in the carpet and could see that the sofa had been placed in front of the door and then shoved aside.

I opened the door, holding the knob with two fingers. It moved easily, even though it was heavy and solid. I closed it, stumped.

"How did the killer get out?" I said, mostly to myself.

"Maybe he didn't get out. Maybe the killer is still in the apartment." Herb's eyes widened and his hand shot up, pointing over my shoulder. "Jack! Behind you!"

I rolled my eyes.

"Funny, Herb. I already searched the place."

I peeled off the gloves and stuck them back in my pocket.

"Well, then there are only three possibilities." Herb held up his hand, ticking off fingers. "One, Coursey and Johnson and the superintendent are all lying. Two, the killer was skinny enough to slip out of the apartment by going under the door. Or three, it was Houdini."

"Houdini's dead."

"Did you check? Get an alibi?"

"I'll send a team to the cemetery."

While we waited for the M.E. to arrive, Herb and I busied ourselves with tossing the place. Bank statements told us Janet Hellerman made a comfortable living and paid her bills on time. She was financing a late-model Lexus, which we confirmed was parked in the lot below. Her credit-card debt was minimal, with a recent charge for plane tickets. A call to Delta confirmed two seats to Montana for next week, one in her name and one in the name of Glenn Hale.

Herb called the precinct, requesting a sheet on Hale.

I checked the answering machine and listened to thirty-eight messages. Twenty were from Janet's distraught mother, wondering where she was. Two were telemarketers. One was from a friend named Sheila who wanted to get together for dinner. The rest were real-estate related.

Nothing from Hale. He wasn't on the Caller ID, either.

I checked her cell phone next, and listened to forty more messages, ten from Mom and thirty from home buyers. Hale hadn't left any messages, but there was a "Glenn" listed on speed dial. The phone's call log showed that Glenn's number had called over a dozen times, but not once since last week.

"Look at this, Jack."

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I glanced over at Herb. He set a pink plastic case on the kitchen counter and opened it up. It was a woman's tool kit, the kind they sold at department stores for fifteen bucks. Each tool had a cute pink handle and a corresponding compartment that it snugged into. This kit contained a hammer, four screwdrivers, a measuring tape, and eight wrenches. There were also two empty slots; one for needle-nose pliers, and one for something five inches long and rectangular.

"The utility knife," I said.

Herb nodded. "She owned the weapon. It's looking more and more like suicide, Jack. She has a fight with Hale. He dumps her. She kills herself."

"You find anything else?"

"Nothing, really. She liked to mountain climb, apparently. There's about forty miles of rope in her closet, lots of spikes and beaners, and a picture of her clinging to a cliff. She also has an extraordinary amount of teddy bears. There are so many piled on her bed, I don't know how she could sleep on it."

"Diary? Computer?"

"Neither. Some photo albums, a few letters that we'll have to look through."

Someone knocked. We glanced across the breakfast bar and saw the door ease open.

Mortimer Hughes entered. Hughes was a medical examiner. He worked for the city, and his job was to visit crime scenes and declare people dead. You'd never guess his profession if you met him on the street—he had the smiling eyes and infectious enthusiasm of a television chef.

"Hello, Jack, Herb, beautiful day out." He nodded at us and set down a large tackle box that housed the many particular tools of his trade. Hughes opened it up and snugged on some plastic gloves and booties. He also brandished kneepads.

Herb and I paused in our search and watched him work. Hughes knelt beside the vic and spent ten minutes poking and prodding, humming tunelessly to himself. When he finally spoke, it was high-pitched and cheerful.

"She's dead," Hughes said.

We waited for more.

"At least four days, probably longer. I'm guessing from hypovolemic shock. Blood loss is more than forty percent. Her right zygomatic bone is shattered, pre-mortem or early post."

"Could she have broken her cheek falling down?" Herb asked.

"On this thick carpet? Possible—yes. Likely—no. Look at the blood pool. No arcs. No trails."

"So she wasn't conscious when her wrist was cut?"

"That would be my assumption, unless she laid down on the

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floor and stayed perfectly still while bleeding to death."

"Sexually assaulted?"

"Can't tell. I'll do a swab."

I chose not to watch, and Herb and I went back into the kitchen. Herb pursed his lips.

"It could still be suicide. She cuts her wrist, falls over, breaks her cheekbone, dies unconscious."

"You don't sound convinced."

"I'm not. I like the boyfriend. They're fighting, he bashes her in the face. Maybe he can't wake her up, or he thinks he's killed her. Or he wants to kill her. He finds the toolbox, gets the utility knife, makes it look like a suicide."

"And then magically disappears."

Herb frowned. "That part I don't like."

"Maybe he flushed himself down the toilet, escaped through the plumbing."

"You can send Coursey out to get a plunger."

"Lieutenant?"

Officer Coursey had returned. He stood by the kitchen counter, his face ashen.

"What is it, Officer?"

"I was doing the door-to-door. No one answered at the apartment directly across the hall. The superintendent thought that was strange—an old lady named Mrs. Flagstone lives there, and she never leaves her home. She even sends out for groceries. So the super opens up her door and . . . you'd better come look."

Mrs. Flagstone stared up at me with milky eyes. Her tongue protruded from her lips like a hunk of raw liver. She was naked in the bathtub, her face and upper body submerged in foul water, one chubby leg hanging over the edge. The bloating was extensive. Her white hair floated around her head like a halo.

"Still think it's a suicide?" I asked Herb.

Mortimer Hughes rolled up his sleeve and put his hand into the water. He pressed her chest and bubbles exploded out of her mouth and nose.

"Didn't drown. Her lungs are full of air."

He moved his hand higher, prodding the wrinkled skin on her neck.

"I can feel some damage to the trachea. There also appears to be a lesion around her neck. I want to get a sample of the water before I pull the drain plug."

Hughes dove into his box. Herb, Coursey, and I left him and went into the living room. Herb called in, requesting the forensics team.

"Any hits from the other tenants?" I asked the rookie.

He flipped open his pad. "One door over, at apartment 3010, the

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occupant, a Mr. Stanley Mankowicz—he remembers some yelling coming from the victim's place about six days ago."

"Does he remember what time?"

"It was late, he was in bed. Mr. Mankowicz shares a wall with the vic, and has called her on several occasions to tell her to turn her television down."

"Did he call that night?"

"He was about to, but the noise stopped."

"Where's the super?"

"Johnson hasn't finished taking his statement."

"Call them both in here."

While waiting for them to arrive, I examined Mrs. Flagstone's door. Like Janet's, it had a safety chain, and like Janet's, it had been ripped from the wall and the mounting was hanging from the door. I found four screws and some splinters on the floor. There were no screws in the doorframe.

A knock, and I opened the door. Officer Johnson and the super. Johnson was older than his partner, bigger, with the same dead eyes. The superintendent was a Pakistani man named Majid Patel. Mr. Patel had dark skin and red eyes and he clearly enjoyed all of this attention.

"I moved to this country ten years ago, and I have never seen a dead body before. Now I have seen two in the same day. I must call and tell my mother. I call my mother when anything exciting happens."

"We'll let you go in a moment, Mr. Patel. I'm Lieutenant Jack Daniels, this is Detective Herb Benedict. We just have a few—"

"Your name is Jack Daniels? But you are not a man."

"You're very observant," I said, deadpan. "Did you know Janet Hellerman?"

Patel winked at me. Was he flirting?

"It must be hard, Lieutenant Jack Daniels, to be a pretty woman with a funny name in a profession so dominated by male chauvinist pigs." Patel offered Herb a look. "No offense."

Herb returned a pleasant smile. "None taken. If you could please answer the lieutenant's question."

Patel grinned, all crooked teeth and spinach remnants.

"She was a real-estate lawyer. Young and good-looking. Always paid her rent on time. My brother gave her a deal on her apartment, because she had nice legs." Patel had no reservations about openly checking out mine. "Yours are very nice, too, Jack Daniels. For an older lady. Are you single?"

"She's single." Herb winked at me, gave me an elbow. I made a mental note to fire him later.

"Your brother?" I asked Patel.

"He's the building owner," Officer Johnson chimed in. "It's the

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family business."

"Did you know anything about Janet's personal life?"

"She had a shit for a boyfriend, a man named Glenn. He had an affair and she dumped him."

"When was this?"

"About ten days ago. I know because she asked me to change the lock on her door. She had given him a key and he wouldn't return it."

"Did you change the lock?"

"No. Ms. Hellerman just mentioned it to me in the elevator once. She never filled out the work-order request."

"Does the building have a doorman?"

"No. We have security cameras."

"I'll need to see tapes going back two weeks. Can you get them for me?"

"It will not be a problem."

Mortimer Hughes came out of the bathroom. He was holding a closed set of tweezers in one hand, his other hand cupped beneath it.

"I dug a fiber out of the victim's neck. Red, looks synthetic."

"From a rope?" I asked.

Hughes nodded.

"Mr. Patel, we'll be down shortly for those tapes. Coursey, Johnson, help Herb and me search the apartment. Let's see if we can find the murder weapon."

We did a thorough toss, but couldn't find any rope. However, Herb found a pair of needle-nose pliers in a closet. Pliers with pink handles.

"They were neighbors," Herb reasoned. "Janet could have lent them to her."

"Could have. But we both doubt it. Call base to see if they found anything on Hale."

Herb dialed, talked for a minute, then hung up.

"Glenn Hale has been arrested three times, all assault charges. Did three months in Joliet."

I wasn't surprised. All evidence pointed to the boyfriend, except for the damned locked room. Maybe Herb was right and the killer just slipped under the door and . . .

Epiphany.

"Call the lab team. I want the whole apartment dusted. Then get an address and a place of work on Hale and send cars. Tell them to wait for the warrant."

Herb raised an eyebrow. "A warrant? Shouldn't we question the guy first?"

"No need," I said. "He did it, and I know how."

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Feeling, a bit foolishly, like Sherlock Holmes, I took everyone back into Janet's apartment. They began hurling questions at me, but I held up my hand for order.

"Here's how it went," I began. "Janet finds out Glenn is cheating, dumps him. He comes over, wanting to get her back. She won't let him in. He uses his key, but the safety chain is on. So he busts in and breaks the chain."

"But the chain was on when we came in the first time," Coursey complained.

Herb hushed him, saving me the trouble.

"They argue," I went on. "Glenn grabs her arm, hits her. She falls to the floor, unconscious. Who knows what's going through his mind? Maybe he's afraid she'll call the police and he'll go to jail—he has a record and this state has zero tolerance for repeat offenders. Maybe he's so mad at her he thinks she deserves to die. Whatever the case, he finds Janet's tool kit and takes out the utility knife. He slits her wrist and puts the knife in her other hand."

Five inquisitive faces hung on my every word. It was a heady experience.

"Glenn has to know he'd be a suspect." I raised my voice just a touch, for dramatic effect. "The only way to throw off suspicion is to make it look like no one else could have been in the room—to show the police that it had to be a suicide."

"Jack," Herb admonished. "You're dragging it out."

"If you figured it out, then you'd have the right to drag it out, too."

"Are you really single?" Patel asked. He grinned again, showing more spinach.

"If she keeps stalling," Herb told him, "I'll personally give you her number."

I shot Herb with my eyes, then continued.

"Okay, so Glenn goes into Janet's closet and gets a length of climbing rope. He also grabs the needle-nose pliers from her toolbox and heads back to the front door. The safety chain has been ripped out of the frame, and the mounting is dangling on the end. He takes a single screw," I pointed at the screw sticking in the doorframe, "and puts it back in the doorframe about halfway."

Herb nodded, getting it. "When the mounting came free, it had to pull out all four screws. So the only way one could still be in the doorframe is if someone put it there."

"Right. Then he takes the rope and loops it under a sofa leg. He goes out into the hall with the rope and closes the door, still holding both ends of the rope. He tugs the rope through the crack under the door and pulls the sofa right up to the door from the other side."

"Clever," Johnson said.

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"I must insist you meet my mother," Patel said.

"But the chain . . ." Coursey whined.

I smiled at Coursey. "He opens the door a few inches, and grabs the chain with the needle-nose pliers. He swings the loose end over to the doorframe, where it catches and rests on the screw he put in halfway."

I watched the light finally go on in Coursey's eyes. "When Mr. Patel opened the door, it looked like the chain was on, but it really wasn't. It was just hanging on the screw. The thing that kept the door from opening was the sofa."

"Right. So when you burst into the room, you weren't the one who broke the safety chain. It was already broken."

Coursey nodded rapidly. "The perp just lets go of one end of the rope and pulls on the other end, freeing it from the sofa leg. Then he locks the door with his own key."

"But poor Mrs. Flagstone," I continued, "must have seen him in the hallway. She has her safety chain on, maybe asks him what he's doing. So Glenn bursts into her room and strangles her with the climbing rope. The rope was red, right, Herb?"

Herb grinned. "Naturally. How did you know that?"

"I guessed. Then Glenn ditches the pliers in the closet, makes a half-assed attempt to stage Mrs. Flagstone's death like a drowning, and leaves with the rope. I bet the security tapes will concur."

"What if he isn't seen carrying the rope?"

No problem. I was on a roll.

"Then he either ditched it in a hall, or wrapped it around his waist under his shirt before leaving."

"I'm gonna go check the tapes," Johnson said, hurrying out.

"I'm going to call my mother," Patel said, hurrying out.

Herb got on the phone to get a warrant, and Mortimer Hughes shook my hand and then went back to Mrs. Flagstone's apartment.

I was feeling pretty smug, something I rarely associated with my line of work, when I noticed Officer Coursey staring at me. His face was projecting such unabashed admiration that I almost blushed.

"Lieutenant—that was just . . . amazing."

"Simple detective work. You could have figured it out if you thought about it."

"I never would have figured that out." He glanced at his shoes, then back at me, and then he turned and left.

Herb pocketed his cell and offered me a sly grin.

"We can swing by the D.A.'s office, pick up the warrant in an hour. Tell me, Jack. How'd you put it all together?"

"Actually, you gave me the idea. You said the only way the killer could have gotten out of the room was by slipping under the door.

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In a way, that's what he did."

Herb clapped his hand on my shoulder.

"Nice job, Lieutenant. Don't get a big head. You wanna come over for supper tonight? Bernice is making pot roast. I'll let you invite Mr. Patel."

"He'd have to call his mother first. Speaking of mothers . . ."

I glanced at the body of Janet Hellerman, and again felt the emotional punch. The Caller ID in the kitchen gave me the number for Janet's mom. It took some time to tell the whole story, and she cried through most of it. By the end, she was crying so much that she couldn't talk anymore.

I gave her my home number so she could call me later.

The lab team finally arrived, headed by a detective named Perkins. Soon both apartments were swarming with tech heads—vacuuming fibers, taking samples, spraying chemicals, shining ALS, snapping pictures, and shooting video.

I filled Detective Perkins in on what went down and left him in charge of the scene.

Then Herb and I went off to get the warrant. ●

A Case of Counterfeiting **(continued from page 87)**

inside-back cover. In the original issue, the outer-back cover carried an advertisement showing a woman on a step-exerciser. "There was something about that ad," Cummings told me. "We would have had to get clearance on it. Plus, when Johnny picked up the magazine and showed the back side, we didn't really want a woman on a step-machine." So the back cover was reversed to show a black-and-white ad for *EQMM* featuring a detective with a magnifying glass.

Inside the magazine, Cummings and crew had to make a few modifications as well. The contents page would now include the story "Secret Window" by Morton Rainey. But even in the quick glances we get of interior story pages, we see that the film crew did a meticulous job duplicating the style and typeface of the stories and introductory blurbs for everything they inserted.

One of the challenges that faced Cummings came when the cinematographer asked for a giant-size copy of the magazine. "He pointed out that it never looks right when you try to shoot a closeup of the page with a normal lens and blow it up. It's better if you blow up the magazine first and use a different lens, so that it will catch what your eye sees as opposed to what a movie lens would pick up shooting the actual book. So we made a version of the magazine that was three or four times as big to shoot that little closeup."

What is surprising is how much work the production team was prepared to go through in order to keep their version of the magazine like the real issue of *EQMM* published in June 1995.

continued on page 142

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THE MAN IN THE VAN

by Robert S. Levinson

He smelled death—what drew his attention to the van. Not the van's dents or the smashed-in right rear bumper or the faded black color or the out-of-state plates—the giveaway signs all the news broadcasts were telling everybody about. The smell of death. It got him thinking, got him wiping his hands dry and wandering up front from the kitchen for a look-see out the window of MISS ANGIE'S A-1 PIT-STOP CAFE, the van's brake lights just snapping out in an isolated slot in the parking lot, even though there were dozens of spots closer to anyplace doing business in the strip this time of morning.

Robert S. Levinson knows the movie business from just about every angle. The production company he once ran with partner Steve North was involved in a project with the legendary Jacques Tati; in another incarnation, in public relations for Hollywood, he represented the Motion Picture Academy, the annual Academy Awards, and pictures for 20th Century Fox; and in his writing life, his novel *The Elvis and Marilyn Affair* is now under option for film. ¶

This was maybe fifty yards away and his eyesight wasn't good enough, even with the new glasses, that he could make out the face of the man easing out the driver's side, see if he looked anywhere close to the police artist's composite sketch of the man the little girl said dragged her older sister kicking and shouting from their front yard, guy about thirty to fifty, maybe younger or older—eight-year-olds being basically unreliable when it came to reckoning an adult's age. Bushy black hair and eyebrows, eyes buried inside full-moon shades, and a set of lips too small to contain his overbite. The police going public with the best they could, hanging on to straws being somehow better than trying to snatch a fly.

No matinée idol, the suspect, and neither was the guy from the van, working a straight line to Miss Angie's. Brownie held off his beeline back to the kitchen until he could get a better look, see that the guy was near enough to the sketch to be him, even

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though the bottom half of his face was sporting a Castro 'stache and beard. That overbite, teeth that once could have belonged to a mule, that told the story. That, and the smell of death, coming on stronger the closer he got, the way a skunk can go from lighting up a spot on the street to an entire neighborhood.

God, how he hated that smell.

Thought it would never find him again, but here it was back after five, no, six years—six years in another month and four days. He did the tote on his fingers, to be certain he had it right. He had it right. Six years in another month and four days.

Angie cold-cocked him with her eyes as he settled back at the griddle and pulled an order from the spin wheel, the first of three up there when he went out front to the window, now one of five; the number six—eggs over easy—and a number two continental deluxe, wheat toast, dry, for both. She didn't like him falling behind that way, Angie—usually when he ducked out back for a fast smoke, three or four strong draws before he finger-pinched the butt and stowed it back in his apron pocket. This wasn't the same, but he wasn't going to tell her that, about the smell that was for him overpowering the grease that routinely clogged the air and covered the walls and the ceiling of the cafe like five spare coats of paint.

Angie wasn't really her name. Her name was Sharlene. Angie was Sharlene's mama and when she died, the cafe passed on to her daughter, who was then seventeen and had been at the counter trade since the age of thirteen or fourteen—Angie figuring that was true education in the real world, more important than anything a book could tell her. Angie was sleeping with Bobby Jack Bigelow, who ran the school district, and that was enough to keep Sharlene's truancy from ever becoming an issue.

Brownie learned about that from Sharlene about a year after she took him in, by which time she'd figured he was around to stay and not another of those fly-by-nighters road-tricking from one end of the country to the other that she usually fell for. Not to say Sharlene *fell* for him exactly. Brownie was more like comfort candy, someone to chew on those times she got hungry for more than their talk about all that was wrong with life in general and her life in particular. Mainly she wanted someone she could let see how far she was from dumb or stupid or whatever it was a lot of people in town thought, the ones who knew she'd never caught up with a high school diploma.

Brownie knew better from Day One, when he was second-guessing himself on the HELP WANTED sign propped in a corner of the window; wheeled around on her voice telling him, "It calls for someone with muscle who ain't afraid to use them, don't mind dishwashing or mucking up his hands with garbage and filthy toi-

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lets, and maybe knows some about jockeying a griddle, but that can come later."

"What's it pay?"

"Like you'll never save up enough for a new car, but there's three squares a day, a clean bed and stretching room at my house out back there—both of which you look like you can use—and one day a week that you can call your own." Sharlene read his face while he was thinking about it. "It's none of my damn business where you come from or what brought you here to Pipeline, so you can put that question to rest, mister."

That's when he understood she had brains to go along with her body, chunky and nothing if not sexy inside one of those yellow waitress-dress uniforms with the dainty white apron that he had seen waitresses wearing at a few other places where the Greyhound pit-stopped, but not ever with the excitement this gal didn't have to advertise to get noticed.

"Sounds good," he said. "You're Miss Angie, then?"

She shook her head and told him what that was all about. "And you got a name?"

"Jones. People call me 'Jonesy.' "

"I'm surprised it's not Smith and people call you 'Smitty.' " Her smile let him know she might be somebody's fool, but not his. "I would have gone for Brown myself. More Browns around than anything, no matter what people think about Jones or Smith, so it's the one that's harder to track, anybody tracking after you."

"What I meant to say. Brown."

"And I suppose people call you 'Brownie.' "

"That's right."

She held out her hand. "So we got a deal and welcome, Brownie. You go get your gear from the bus station and bring it on around back to the house. We'll get you settled in and start the tour from there."

"How do you know I'm not driving?"

"You had a car, Brownie, you wouldn't be jumping at my lousy offer is how."

None of the eight customers looked up as the man from the van pushed open the door to Miss Angie's and entered, hands jammed in his pockets and shoulders hunched against the cold outside, the radio news reporting it was in the mid forties but expected to climb to the mid fifties by nine or ten. He rubbed his palms for warmth while checking around and gave himself a nod of approval and a flicker of a smile that also said he was satisfied his anonymity was safe here. He headed for the counter stool closest to the cash register, drawing momentary notice from a pair of truckers three spots down the row, who were going back and forth

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about some basketball game, players with names strange to Brownie, mumbled through mouthfuls of eggs over easy, hotcakes, and Miss Angie's famous "greasy gourmet hash-brown honey potatoes," all drenched in enough butter and syrup to clog the Holland Tunnel.

After another minute, Sharlene was there wondering if the man from the van, he needed coffee or was ready to order. He passed on the coffee with a gesture, ordered without looking at the menu, and began tapping out a nervous melody on the scarred Formica countertop, like he'd already been made to wait too long.

Brownie swiped the order the second Sharlene had it in the spin wheel.

TO GO: Ham and eggs, scrambled. Fries. White toast, dry. Tall coffee, black. A tuna sandwich, also on white toast, hold the mayo. Side of potato salad. Side of coleslaw. A diet cola, no ice.

He was either stockpiling lunch or had a passenger in the van with a curious breakfast appetite.

He caught Brownie staring at him through the service bay, locked onto Brownie's eyes, and wouldn't let go. Brownie suddenly had difficulty breathing; the smell of death overriding every other smell in the cafe, clogging his nostrils, filling his throat with its ugly taste.

The man from the van made the kind of face that said he smelled something rotten, too. He plugged his nose with his fingers and pointed an accusing finger at Brownie, then gave him a thumbs-up that could have meant, *We're two of a kind, you and me.*

The man from the van signaled Sharlene over, said something to her that caused her to wheel around and move on the service counter.

She said, "Brownie, the tourist with the bad teeth there's growling you're slower than a dead tortoise. Move his takeout up and let's get him the hell out of here before he's sharing his lousy opinion with everybody. And no loogie in his coffee, like some of those other times when you got a complainer riding your hairy butt."

"Order up in five," he said, "and then I need a piss break."

"You smoke too much," Sharlene said.

Brownie lit up ten steps past the back door, on his way to the house, and was almost to the porch when he realized that wasn't the phone to use. The number was sure to show up the way it did with all the calls he ever saw placed on *Wanted: Dead or Alive.*

He reversed himself and angled off for the pay phone across the alley by the gas station. Fished some coins from his pocket. Weighed them before he dropped the quarter in the slot and tapped out the three numbers. An answer on the first ring, the

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woman on the other end with the all-business manner sounding like she was glad to be getting some action.

"Yes, you can," Brownie said, putting a deep spin on his voice and slowing it down. "You know the van everybody's searching for?" He threw out the details. "Well, I think I just spotted it on the road, dirt and all, enough of a look at the driver to say he's the one who snatched that poor little girl."

The woman at nine-one-one played back the highway number, the direction, then asked for his name and location.

Request declined.

"Big reward coming to you, you're right about this and it leads to that bastard's arrest," the woman said.

"This isn't about money," Brownie said, and hung up. Pulled the grease towel from his hip pocket and wiped the phone clean of prints.

Sharlene gave him the eye when he got back to the grill, where she was finishing up an order of sunny-sides and bacon, "greasy gourmet hash-brown honey potatoes," and a junior pile of square cakes. She shoved the spatula at him, saying, "You must have the slowest pisser ever made."

"Broke the mold after me," Brownie said, reaching up for the next order up on the spin wheel.

By lunchtime, the cafe regulars were buzzing with talk about the capture, how the cops had stopped the van less than three miles from right here, on a tip from somebody they weren't identifying, or couldn't, more likely, from the sound of it. Brownie went along, trying to ignore the telling looks he was getting from Sharlene.

She kept it up all through the day, but silent on the subject, until somewhere around one in the morning, them in bed, her only going through the motions, same as she'd been doing for weeks, none of the passion or invention he used to savor and she used to brag about. Around one, she eased herself into a sitting position, adjusted her pillows for comfort, and cleared her throat of phlegm before wondering, "You awake, Brownie?"

He thought about not answering, suspecting where any conversation would lead, but there was something sorrowful he heard between the words when she spoke them again that made him say, "Either that or I'm answering you in my sleep."

"It keeping you up, too, better'n me?"

"Nothing's better'n you, except maybe us. What's the 'it' you have in mind?"

"The reward money."

"What reward money?"

"The two hundred and fifty thousand dollars you got coming to you for leading the police to that rat bastard what killed the girl."

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"Nothing's been said about her being dead, Sharlene."

"Nothing's been said otherwise, either, but she wasn't in the van and only a fool would think to believe he dropped her off by the side of a road somewhere and told her to get along home now, little girl. Not the point, though."

"The point is, I don't know what you're talking about or what makes you think I should get the two hundred and fifty thousand dollars." He pushed down deeper under the covers, rotated onto his side so he was turned away from her, half expecting her to switch on the lamp and see the lies written all over his face.

Of course the little girl was dead, her suffering ended, hidden in a shallow grave or a ditch or a body of water somewhere, maybe never to be found; what always happens, isn't it?

Why he caught the smell of death on the driver of the van.

Sharlene said, "That phone call I got just before closing, Brownie?"

"So what? You're always getting phone calls."

"And you're always using that phone whenever you need, but not today."

"Not today? Sure, today. You think Dickie Paul down at the bakery will be delivering exactly what and how much we need tomorrow because he's suddenly so great at guesswork?"

"The one over at Doug Russell's garage, that phone call. When you were off to take a piss, you said, only you were taking a smoke, but really needing a phone."

"So, you spying on me now, Sharlene? Maybe I got a woman on the side and didn't want to be caught talking to her by you? Maybe I've been using Doug's phone regularly."

"This town's too small for you or anybody to keep that kind of secret." Saying it like she knew he was working on some other kind. "Satisfying my curiosity when I stepped off after you is what I was doing. You always so holy righteous and all with me about trying to cut down on those damn lung killers."

"Not the easiest habit in the world to get over. You don't need me to tell you that."

"Know it only too well. . . . My call. Was from Joe Sutton, who's following up on the arrest and all. Joe said the tip came from Doug's call box and he was checking to see if me or anybody might've seen somebody at Doug's about the time the call-in got made to nine-one-one. . . . By my reckoning, that was you, Brownie."

"What's the detective looking to do? Deliver the reward money personally?"

"Just to question the man and hope he might know something else that could lead to the little girl. Her parents worried sick and trying to keep their hopes up."

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"You told the detective about me using the phone?"

"Said I'd have to think on it. I started figuring then and ever since—Brownie's not so rich he wouldn't right away be jumping up and down and spending the money, instead of hiding the fact it was him who spotted the man for the police, unless, of course, Brownie has more than that to hide . . . Do you—Jonesy? Do you—Smitty?" When he didn't answer her immediately, she said, "What's her name?" and cackled into the darkness, knowing better.

Brownie rolled off the bed.

"Need a piss," he said, and stalked off. He used the time to think, wondering how much it was time for her to know and how she would react to the ugly truth that had stuck to him like skin ever since. He went through the motions of flushing and washing his hands, angled himself into a sitting position, feet on the floor, when he got back, substituting the door across the room for her. "Why now, Sharlene? Why after all this time—five years and then some—do you have to hear about my past, when it's never mattered before?"

"It could matter now."

"You thinking, if it's me, then maybe you're entitled to some of the reward money, like it'll be a payback for taking me in in the first place and looking out for me ever since?"

"I'm thinking, maybe Brownie has a better reason for not claiming the money than I have for him claiming it."

"Your reason being?"

"My reason being that maybe Brownie wouldn't mind using some of the reward money could be due him to help me stay alive longer than what I've been hearing from Doc Geller."

"Oh Jesus, Sharlene. Oh Jesus." Brownie climbed into bed beside her, wrapped her in his arms and held her tight, aware for the first time tonight—for who knows how long—that she was carrying her own smell of death.

"It's a woman thing," Sharlene said when she finally felt like talking, sharing more than usual, her voice a confidential whisper. "It finds you and it don't let go. You fight it, it doesn't even fight back. Grow is what it does, until finally it outgrows you and—poof!—you're gone."

"And it's some operation, then, keeps your ticker pumping?"

"It keeps your hopes alive is what it does, and, hopefully, you with it. That's the best they tell me anymore." She clung harder to Brownie, steeled herself after swallowing a breath as deep as her despair. "It's gone past your turn now, so what do you say?"

He played with silence for a few moments more, then, "I don't need the bread. You're welcome to the reward, all of it, in a heartbeat, only it's life-and-death for me, too, I go after it. Actually, death, so ain't we a pair?"

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"You showed up at my door when you did back then with the police on your case. So?"

"Hide-and-seek. Them breathing down my neck, like the man in the van."

"Knew from the first we met, but I had this good feeling about you, so saw no reason to rub your nose in it. No skin off mine." He tapped the tip of her chin the way he sometimes did to show his appreciation. Inched back when she tried to answer him with a kiss. "Brownie, what I got you couldn't possibly catch in a million light years, so you relax, okay?"

"Sure," and this time he let the kiss play out. "You want to hear the rest?"

"You tell me."

"You'll think less of me, bottom of the barrel."

"I put up with your cooking skills, don't get much lower than that."

Brownie left her and the bed and padded across to the window. Pulled back the curtains. Studied the shadows drifting over the quiet landscape. "Everything about me's unreal, not just my name. It's what you got to do in situations like mine, if you care about surviving. . . . A Social Security card, easiest thing in the world to pick up. Just for show, in case. Safer is getting odd jobs or working for somebody like you, where it's cash on the barrelhead. . . . No driver's license, because that means a picture and a fingerprint . . . So, no car, which is all right, because it means you don't have to worry about no cops hauling you over, throwing that one question too many in your face."

"What did you do, Brownie?"

"Did the right thing, calling nine-one-one about what I saw. But doing more after that gets me too close to the police for comfort. My picture on TV. In the newspapers . . . Somebody seeing enough of me to recognize all of me, like the way it happens a lot on that TV program *Wanted: Dead or Alive.* You recall Steve McQueen? Steve, he once had a TV program of the same name. Played a cowboy bounty hunter. Once in a while it gets shown on the Nostalgia Channel. This new *Wanted: Dead or Alive,* though, it's the genuine article, where anybody watching can be the bounty hunter."

"You going to answer my question before the birds start singing?" She signaled him to come back to bed by patting his place. A minute later, she was investing her lips softly on his forehead and urging, "What did you do to keep you looking over your shoulder, Brownie? Looking out the window just now like you expected to see the hounds of hell outside. Tell mama. Tell mama everything." The look on her face full of sympathy and understanding.

Sharlene. The last person left on earth he felt he could put his trust in.

He said, "You know how that man in the van, he kidnapped that

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young girl and by now for sure, people like him being what they are, he's done away with her?"

"Yes."

The smell of death was gagging him. He fought it off and said, "They been after me all these years for doing worse, Sharlene."

"What could be worse, Brownie?"

"You don't really want to know."

"Probably, but I have to hear it anyway."

So, he told her.

He was hardly into it, painting pictures for her he would never be able to drain from his memory, skimming, not even going into the details he detested as much as he had come to detest himself, when he saw her expression shifting. Imperceptibly, but enough for Brownie to see how her sympathy had ebbed and all that remained of her understanding was a false smile she fought to keep from giving her away. Unsuccessfully. Her revulsion revealed by the flickering tremor in the down-turned corners of her mouth.

He knew it. He knew he should have resisted telling her. Now, it would have to end the way it did the last time. The time before that. So long ago, enough years with Sharlene to believe maybe it wouldn't happen again. Believe maybe her feelings for him were strong enough for her to see the changed man inside the creature he had once been instead of bringing out the creature all over again.

At least this time, with Sharlene, he wouldn't feel so bad after he finished, or so he was already hoping. She was dying anyway, after all. She'd said so herself. He smelled it on her, did he not? Even if she got her hands on the reward money, what it could do for her—the operation—it wasn't going to change that any. He might even be doing her a favor. His way would be faster, less painful. Not pretty to look at, but she wouldn't be around to know that or even care.

A favor for himself, that for damn certain, by not getting anywhere close to the reward money and opening the door to his past for anyone to have so much as a peek. A damn shame he would have to make tracks, but that came with the territory. Something else he knew. Ruining a good thing with a good woman, but he couldn't have lived with himself if he'd let the man in the van just climb behind the wheel and drive off to do what he was sure to do all over again. Comes with the territory.

Brownie caught the end of what Sharlene was saying, about how she wasn't going to be the one to get him caught, not for any amount of money, and so the operation would have to be something that could never be, not right now. Saying, "I've hung in this long, so a little longer won't hurt. Maybe have to sell Miss Angie's, but that's been on my mind, this is not the first time, only the first time out loud."

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Trying hard to make it sound like the truth.

Make a believer of him.

But it came with the smell of death, hanging over their bed like a black cloud full of puss and plague.

He didn't let on. He didn't let Sharlene see that he knew—playing his own fake face for all it was worth. Like he was sad about what he'd done, how it had been; working up some tears and watering his remorse with some drip he got going from his nose.

He exhaled noisily. "Sleep's history. I need a shooter, slug of something. You?"

"Beats my pain pills, although I'll feel it for the worse by sunup."

Brownie patted her thigh and moved off the bed, asking before he cruised through the door, "The Jackie D?"

"Jackie D. Always best for what ails you. Hold the ice, but bring me a beer for backup."

Sharlene kept the company liquor on display in the front room, on a wrought-iron rolling end table she fell in love with cruising a lawn sale and haggled down to a sawbuck, feeling no guest she was likely to have was good enough for the good stuff she stored in a kitchen cabinet. Why he suggested the Jackie D. Knowing she would go for it. She always went for the Jackie D. Knowing also what he really wanted his hands on was in the kitchen.

Brownie took care opening the drawer where she kept her Ginsus, better than any knives up front in the cafe. The drawer squeaked sometimes, and he didn't want anything tipping her off to what he had in mind, get her guard up and maybe do something stupid now that she knew him for what he was.

Not a sound.

Excellent.

He selected one of the smaller Ginsus, easy to palm, so she wouldn't see it before he was ready for her to see it; good for slicing and dicing after the first jabs that would put her out of the picture; get the job done with a maximum of efficiency and a minimum of bloodletting, what he liked to think of as his trademarks.

His mind drew a portrait of Sharlene: what she looked like now and how she'd look a few minutes from now. The sight hurt. His temples pounding. His stomach aching like all bejesus. He only needed a moment or two to recognize why:

How he felt about Sharlene.

Like he'd never felt about any of the others.

Damn her anyway. How'd she ever make herself so special in his life? So special that he couldn't do it. Not to Sharlene.

So, what now, Brownie? he asked himself.

Let her live?

Stay? Trust her not to call the cops on him?

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Let her call the cops on him, so she could back into the reward money and live?

Not kill her, just disappear from here, from Sharlene's life, wishing only the best for her during whatever time remained, and—

Brownie returned the Ginsu to the drawer.

That answered part of his dilemma.

Plain and simple, he wasn't up for killing Sharlene.

But the rest?

"Everything you ever done, must be a chunk of reward money out there being offered for your hide, Brownie." He wheeled around to the sound of her voice. She was angled against the doorjamb, half in, half out, eyeing him with suspicion. "Reward money piled higher than I don't know what." Her voice full of morbid curiosity. "That so?"

"So, but not the way you think, Sharlene."

"How am I thinking, Brownie?"

"You're thinking one lump sum, but not one is equal to what the check's for for that bogeyman in the van. Put them all together, though, including some with no pointers in my direction—maybe twice, three times as much by now. Dead or alive with most, and even dead don't cut off that much. Or the ones saying *and conviction.* Not just for any information leading to the capture and arrest of yours truly. Takes a conviction to spring the lock on the cash drawer. I wish I ever found a woman wanted me as much as the authorities. More states than fingers. I never been to Hawaii or Alaska, though. One of these days, maybe."

"You don't think I do? Want you that much?"

"Anymore? Knowing what you heard?"

"Still, only in a different way."

"That being?"

"Love you with all my life that I can hold on to, Brownie."

Sharlene turned and revealed herself in the doorway. The hand lost to view until now held the double-barrel shotgun she kept under the bed, in case anybody ever was stupid enough to break in. She raised the weapon and took steady aim, by Brownie's reckoning high enough to build a tunnel through his gut.

"You going to turn me in, then?"

"I'll feel bad about it for a while, that's any consolation. Not as bad as you'll feel, you so much as twitch."

"I was going to kill you, but I changed my mind."

"Don't figure me for changing mine. You pick up the phone there now and you get nine-one-one. Tell them to hurry on over here. Otherwise nothing foolish."

"Probably not, Sharlene."

"After, I'll come visit." She made what was supposed to pass for a

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smile, but Brownie recognized it for what it was, a mask for her greed.

He said, "Too long after and it'll be my grave you visit." Trying not to reveal the anger growing inside him like some cancer.

"I'll bring flowers and pick the weeds away."

What a bitch, he thought, pretending to care about him the way she'd already shown she cared about the money. Bitch. Ready to trade his life for hers.

"Do the same for you, I would." Meaning it. Meaning for it to happen sooner than she could ever expect, what with him staring down the twin barrels of the shotgun and all.

"The phone, Brownie? Nine-one-one. Might as well get this show on the road."

"Might as well," he said, wishing he hadn't put the Ginsu back in the drawer.

He stepped forward, like he meant to head for the phone. From the corner of his eye he caught her tracking him with the shotgun. He gave it two more steps, just enough to open up a straight path to her, then wheeled on one foot and leaped for her. Not fast enough. Sharlene saw him coming. "Ain't we the brave boy, now," she shouted. Before he could push the shotgun aside and lock onto her throat, he heard thunder and saw lightning and felt a pain beyond imagination, then—

Nothing.

Brownie opened his eyes expecting to see hell.

He saw Sharlene.

Wherever he was, Sharlene hovering over him.

He squinted her into focus.

Sharlene, all right.

His eyes hurt, not just at the sight of her.

She leaned in closer to say, "You waking up, finally?"

"Where?" The word played on the back of his throat like sandpaper on silk.

"Hospital. Days now. You're on the mend anymore. Good thing, though, I'm rusty on the trigger or you'd be deader'n a eunuch's nuts." She made herself comfortable on the bed, smoothed out her dress, which smelled of five wears too many and the cheap perfume she substituted for showers. As strong as it was, the smell wasn't as strong as the smell of death overpowering the hospital room's antiseptic odor. "My turn is next. Only I might not be so lucky about leaving." Her expression vouched for her assumption.

"The. Reward. Money?" He managed to struggle through the question, a gasp for air between words.

Her shrill laugh flew to the ceiling and kept going. "Well, get this, Brownie. My police detective friend Joe Sutton, when he called me

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up? Joe had the right phone, the one over at Doug Russell's, but turns out it wasn't you blowing the whistle on the man in the van. Not the first. It was Doug himself what blew the whistle first. Yeah. The pervert scumbag'd gone over to Doug's garage before coming to my place, needing some motor oil or something, and Doug figured him and the van for what was going on. He got right on the phone to sound the alarm the first second he could, and that was before you. So it's Doug who's entitled to the reward, Brownie; you're out in the cold, even if you ever wanted the money."

Brownie showed her that wasn't what he'd meant by the question, tapping at his chest when the words wouldn't come.

"You, you mean? That what you're asking?"

"Ye—" A sound more than a word.

Sharlene switched her stare from space to him and back again. In that brief glance, he thought he saw her eyes misting over. "You're quite the lying son of a bitch, you are," she said, not with anger, more with a curious appreciation. "Oh, I spilled on you to the police, the way I said I would, don't think otherwise even for a second. I explained to the police how it was you came to attack me and me defending myself and sending you to the hospital almost dead, except for some decent doctors we got around here. I toted up my reward money every passing hour and day I waited for confirmation from them, feasting on that money like fish eggs. What did I hear, though? You know what, Brownie. I heard none of what you confessed to me was any truer than if you'd claimed to be the king of England. You made it all up, the whole ball of wax. Nothing to tie them crimes together and nothing to say it was you done them, not one."

She rose from the bed, spread her legs and clamped her hands to her hips, as if daring him to deny her discovered truth. She held the pose for a few more moments, then moved on to a truth of her own, saying, "Well, I got an imagination to rival yours, Brownie. That stuff about needing an operation? I made it all up, every word, ache, pain. Sure it's what I'd need to get you over not wanting to claim the reward money on the man in the van. If I was dying, it was dying to get my hands on that two hundred and fifty thousand. I suckered you, same as you went on to sucker me. You listening?" She sat down on the bed again and rested her palm on his cheek. "Tell you what, though. We're two of a kind, we are, and I'd miss you, you up and weren't around anymore. What say we write this off and pick up where we left off?"

"You say you got experience, like what?"

"A year and then some over to Pipeline. Miss Angie's A-1 Pit-Stop Cafe? Two states over, truck route, same as you."

"Frenchie's Deluxe Chicken and Ribs is not some trucker's

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grease pit, my good man." He pronounced it *dee-lukes,* and his English wasn't so great in a lot of other places—an accent that could have come from anywhere but homegrown. He didn't look the part, either, what with his wrinkled rawhide skin and eyes like eightballs, a waxed bush for a moustache, stretching almost two inches past his cheeks. "We cater here to the family trade. Willowood, not a big city, but big enough for the family trade. Maybe six thousand good, fine people." Doing a commercial, like he was selling real estate or heading up the Chamber of Commerce. A voice as robust as his belly, which would have looked better on somebody six inches taller. "Fry cook, you said?"

"Doing dishes first off, then got promoted. All-around, actually. Whatever needed doing is where I got the call, finally, if not right off the bat. Sort of like your sign in the window said." He held up the battered piece of cardboard like an ice-skating judge.

"Missambee's Eighty-one Pit Cafe. I know that name, though. Why do I know that name, though?"

He didn't bother correcting Frenchie, or whoever this guy was settling down on the stool behind the cash register. "Was in the news not long ago. You ever watch *48 Hours* or especially *Wanted: Dead or Alive?"* The guy shrugged and turned his palms to the ceiling. "The owner, my boss, people called her 'Angie,' but Sharlene was really her name. She got herself murdered."

The guy snapped his fingers. "Yes, yes, now I know why it's familiar. *The National Weekly Informer.* Burglary or something?"

"Middle of the night. Somebody broke into Sharlene's place behind the cafe, took one of her Japanese knives from her kitchen—"

"A Ginsu."

"Exactly. Took one of her Ginsus from the kitchen, crept up on her asleep in her bed, and—" He ran a finger across his throat. "Made a mess of her before he was finished. Could've been me, too, but I was the lucky one."

"How's that?"

He drew the saddest face he could manage. "It's a long story."

"Plenty of time for me to hear it." He held out his hand. "I pay minimum, time and a half for overtime, double on weekends and after midnight. Even good medical after the first year. We start you off on the mop and see what's next. I'm Emil."

"Name's Jones, but I go by 'Brownie,' " Brownie said, accepting Emil's tight grip.

Emil looked amused. "Brownie, not 'Jonesy.' Another long story?"

"Yeah, but not as long," Brownie said, with growing awareness that the smell of death was overtaking the aroma of fresh-baked apple pie drifting out of the kitchen. ●

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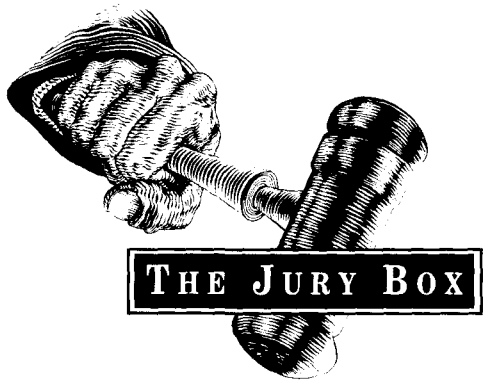

by Jon L. Breen

It's been a while since our last short-story roundup, so while most of the books considered below are quite recent, a few have been out a while. But if you don't find them at the major chains, the combination of independent mystery bookstores and on-line dealers like Amazon.com should turn them up easily enough.

**** Anthony Berkeley: *The Avenging Chance and Other Mysteries from Roger Sheringham's Casebook,* edited by Tony Medawar and Arthur Robinson; Crippen & Landru, $29 hardcover, $19 trade paper. Berkeley (a.k.a. A.B. Cox and Francis Iles) ranks with Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers as an important author of between-World-Wars detective fiction, so this collection (#11 in the publisher's Lost Classics series) is long overdue. Though the title story (first published in 1929 and expanded into the classic novel *The Poisoned Chocolates Case* in the same year) is an anthology staple, and some of the other cases for the damnably clever but not always right Sheringham were reprinted in the early days of *EQMM,* the novella-length "The Mystery of Horne's Copse" and a couple of shorter pieces will be unknown even to most specialists.

**** Donald E. Westlake: *Thieves' Dozen,* Mysterious, $12.95. John Dortmunder, the unlucky crook of several Westlake novels, has had equally hilarious shorter adventures, most first published in *Playboy.* There are actually eleven stories (master humorist Westlake's introduction counts in the dozen), including a new one featuring an alternate-universe Dortmunder known as Rumsey.

**** Margaret Maron: *Suitable for Hanging: Selected Stories,* Crippen & Landru, $17 trade paper, $42 signed limited hardcover. Maron's second collection is even better and more varied than her first, *Shoveling Smoke* (1997). Of the twenty selections, two are new, most from original anthologies, three featuring Judge Deborah Knott. Many of the more recent stories

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are gems, including a pair from *EQMM,* but so is the 1973 *AHMM* tale "To Hide a Tree," combining a unique and devilishly clever howdunit with a sharply observed reflection of its time.

**** Stephen Marlowe: *Drum Beat: The Chester Drum Casebook,* Five Star, $25.95. Following five short stories about the Washington D.C. private eye (who spends most of his time in Europe) is the author's choice of best Drum novel, *Drum Beat—Dominique* (1965). Few P.I. writers give better value than the immensely talented Marlowe, a star of the Gold Medal paperback stable before turning to hardcover thrillers and ambitious historical fiction. Bill Pronzini provides an excellent introduction.

*** Joan Hess: *Big Foot Stole My Wife and Other Stories,* Five Star, $25.95. While these eleven stories—one each from *EQMM* and *AHMM,* the rest from original anthologies—include two each about book dealer Claire Malloy and the Maggody denizens, the best are the non-series tales, which pull the reader into the hilarious lives of some outrageous characters. Especially good are "Heptagon," a clever adaptation of a well-known fairy tale, and the comic revenge tales "Make Yourselves at Home" and "The Cremains of the Day."

*** Jeffery Deaver: *Twisted,* Simon & Schuster, $24.95. In 16 stories, most from *EQMM* and one (about series sleuth Lincoln Rhyme) new, one of crime fiction's purest entertainers seeks new ways to bamboozle the reader. Once you know what he's up to (shock midway, twist at the end, enough foreshadowing to reward the most alert), do the surprises become more predictable? Sometimes (e.g. "Gone Fishing"), but usually not (e.g. "Triangle" or "For Services Rendered").

*** Eric Wright: *A Killing Climate,* Crippen & Landru, $17 trade paper, $42 signed limited hardcover. In sixteen stories, one from *EQMM* and most from original anthologies, one of the top names in Canadian crime fiction delivers a variety of effective tales. The highlight is "The Lady of Shalott," a new novella about Toronto cop Charlie Salter.

*** Liza Cody: *Lucky Dip and Other Stories,* Crippen & Landru, $17 trade paper, $42 signed limited hardcover. Most of these seventeen stories, three new and the rest from original anthologies, are subtle character studies from a first-person female viewpoint, often downbeat and sometimes obscure, but expertly written and crafted. Some of the best (e.g. the adapted BBC radio plays "Doing It Under the Table" and "Chalk Mother") aren't really crime stories at all.

** Stephen Mertz: *Fade to Tomorrow and Other Stories,* Five Star, $25.95. In the title novel, music industry troubleshooter Steve Madison is employed to protect a young blind pop musician, recently out of rehab, from involvement in a drug smuggling scandal. Latter-day pulpster Mertz, an

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unpretentious action specialist, also delivers a surprising and generously clued whodunit. The two accompanying short stories, one new about Madison and the other a reprint from 1979, share the popular music background but are generally less impressive.

** Catherine Aird: *Chapter and Hearse and Other Mysteries,* St. Martin's Minotaur, $23.95. Twenty-two tales, mostly new, include ten about Inspector C.D. Sloan and three each about 1930s Foreign Office troubleshooter Henry Tyler and 16th-century Scottish Sheriff Rhuaraidh Macmillan. The stories are cozy, gentle, and sometimes very slight, but consistently diverting and often ingenious.

** Mickey Spillane: *Primal Spillane: The Early Stories: 1941-1942,* edited by Max Allan Collins and Lynn F. Myers, Jr.; Gryphon, $20, signed limited $40, both trade paper. Is this the first collection ever of those short prose pieces comic books used to include to qualify for a cheap mailing rate? Spillane's are surely better than average for the genre, with patches of effective pulp action writing and some good plot gimmicks. Backgrounds range widely, including many military subjects. Less than half are crime or mystery.

Eleanor Taylor Bland's fine original anthology, *Shades of Black: Crime and Mystery Stories by African-American Writers* (Berkley, $23.95) can stand beside Paula L. Woods's definitive historical collection *Spooks, Spies, and Private Eyes* (1995). Among the highlights: Frankie Y. Bailey's "Since You Went Away," with a vivid background of post-WWII train travel and a cleverly clued puzzle; another train mystery, "Murder on the Southwest Chief," about series cop Marti MacAlister, by the editor and son Anthony Bland; Terris McMahan Grimes's charmingly written "Small Colored World," about series sleuth Theresa Galloway; and the volume's one reprint, Walter Mosley's provocative and thematically complex "Bombardier." Other familiar bylines represented include Gar Anthony Haywood (with an encore for our old friends Joe and Dottie Loudermilk), Percy Spurlark Parker, and Gary Phillips. Illustrating the variety of inclusions are an entry in a 1920s-period juvenile series, Patricia E. Canterbury's "The Secret of the 369th Infantry Nurse," reminiscent in its polite, bloodless style of the Stratemeyer Syndicate's output, but with an added educational component; and an occult police procedural, "The Werewolf File," by the late Hugh Holton, to whom Lerone Bennett, Jr.'s preface pays tribute.

Attention Ed Hoch fans: Issue #31 of *Hardboiled* (Gryphon, $10) has a story about P.I. Al Darlan, "Where There's Smoke," that last appeared in a 1964 issue of *Manhunt.* The 13th edition of the loose-leaf *Edward D. Hoch Bibliography,* by June M. Moffatt and Francis M. Nevins, is available from Moffatt House, Box 4456, Downey, CA 90241.

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Art by Mark Evans

THE KANAIMA

by Scott Mackay

As Detective Barry Gilbert watched his golf ball soar down the fairway, his brother Howard's pager beeped. Gilbert, on holiday in Miami from Toronto, tried to follow the progress of his ball, but he was fifty now, his eyes were going, and it disappeared into the hazy air before he could really tell which way it was going. Howard, a detective with Miami-Dade, on holiday too, but now on call because of a last-minute scheduling snafu, checked his pager, took out his cell phone, and dialed headquarters. They both knew beeping was the modern sound of murder.

"I know the victim," said Howard once he'd finished talking to headquarters. "A guy named Moe Shapiro. One of my informants. I've known him a long time—a taxi driver. I've got to go. They want me on it."

Gilbert stared wistfully toward the distant green. The sun was like a happy sultan presiding over the golf course. The ocean lay gemlike and sparkling beyond. A few cabin cruisers frothed their way southward over the waves, and a palm tree arched like the slender arm of a cheerleader to pom-pom-like fronds.

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"So lunch at the club is out?" he said.

"Why don't you ride along?" suggested Howard. "It might be quick. We can come back for a late lunch."

So Gilbert rode along.

Moe Shapiro sat slumped over the steering wheel of his taxi, the door open, the blood dark on his gray flannels, his glasses lying on the pavement, his wispy white hair all messy.

The uniformed officer glanced at Gilbert, then gave Howard a questioning look.

"He's my brother," explained Howard. "Visiting from Toronto."

The officer nodded, then lifted the police tape for them.

Canadian Scott Mackay was a professional classical musician before turning to fiction writing in 1979. He may have been inspired to make the change by his mother, the well-known young-adult writer Claire Mackay. Mr. Mackay's own stories and books range from mystery to thrillers to science fiction. One of his science fiction stories, "The Wave," has sparked the interest of both film and TV producers, but so far remains unproduced. ¶

"We have one witness," said the officer. "Sally Santa Cruz. She's known to us. A prostitute. I don't think she'll be useful; she has a bad crack habit. She's always seeing things. I've got her in my car."

Gilbert glanced at the patrol car. He saw a halo of dark hair around a brown face, a sleeveless dress with sequins, and big blue studs in tiny girlish ears.

"We'll look at Moe first," said Howard.

They had a closer look at the cabby. Moe Shapiro. Who was he? wondered Gilbert. An old Jew, like so many other old Jews down here. Originally from New York? Maybe from Montreal? Snowbirding here in Florida, but maybe a permanent resident now, supplementing his pension income with cabby earnings. In his seventies. He *smelled* like a guy in his seventies: dirty-sweet—unwashed and uncared for. Small, his bones shrunken. A mole like a raisin hung on his left cheek. He wore a short-sleeved shirt with palm trees—a polyester garment from Taiwan, bargain-store apparel—now all covered with blood.

Gilbert looked at the open door again. Moe's foot dangled above the pavement. As if he was getting out of the car when the two slugs capped him in the back of the head. A concentration-camp tattoo marked his left arm. Dim green numbers. Seemed unfair. After all that Holocaust crap, to wind up like this.

"Was he robbed?" asked Gilbert.

Howard took the cabby's wallet out of his pocket, a thick one stuffed with the business cards of a urologist, a gastroenterologist, an endodontist, and many others—professionals a man Moe's age

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would see much of. Also money. Wads of it, dozens of greenbacks of all denominations stuffed into the billfold.

"No," said Howard. "He definitely wasn't robbed." He glanced at the patrol car. "Let's see what Sally says."

Sally Santa Cruz didn't speak any English. She barely managed Spanish. Crack. Bad. A mush-head. She wasn't Cuban. She wasn't Puerto Rican. The uniform translated: She was Amerindian. From the Venezuelan Highlands. She sat forward, shoulders squeezed toward her neck, a waif of a woman. She cried hysterically. And then she spoke. One thing was obvious. Sally Santa Cruz was frightened out of her wits.

"She says an animal did it," the uniform finally told them, looking bewildered by Sally's story. "She says the *kanaima*. I don't know that word; it's not Spanish. She explained it to me. It's a word from back home. She says like a . . . a man-jaguar. From up in the mountains. It has the body of a man and the face of a jaguar."

"That's what shot Moe?" said Howard, frowning.

"That's what she says," said the uniform. "But like I told you before, she's a crackhead, and she's always seeing things. She says it came out of nowhere, shot Moe, then jumped on that roof over there and got away. She got a good look at it. I told her it couldn't be a man-jaguar, but she insists it is. She says other people in the neighborhood are seeing it, too. They're all Amerindians around here. She says the birds haven't sung for several mornings. She says when the birds stop singing, that's a sure sign the *kanaima* is somewhere around. What can I say? She's a rockhead. She probably saw some guy in a leopard-print T-shirt."

So. What did they have? Tales of the Supernatural? Or a guy in a leopard-print T-shirt?

They drove back to Miami-Dade Police headquarters.

Justin, Howard's partner, sat at his desk doing some work on the Mariana Relós case, a pressing child homicide.

"Now that you're here," said Justin, "John wants to talk to you about the Relós case."

"The pleasures of being on call," said Howard.

"And I heard about Moe," said the young detective. "I really liked the guy."

Howard nodded. "It's a shame," he said.

Howard took one of his case files down from the shelf above his desk and handed it to Gilbert.

"This is my file on George Lescuyer," Howard told Gilbert. "It might have some bearing on Moe. Take a look at it. George Lescuyer was a well-known bookie, specialized in off-track betting. Another one of my informants—murdered two months ago. A bit

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of an artist. Had a place down in the Keys, where he painted seascapes. Had a wife, Suzanne, who was a model ten years ago. We found this at the scene of the crime. We think it's a sketch of his killer. George got shot, he didn't die right away, and he managed this quick sketch before blood loss killed him."

Gilbert looked at the sketch, done on Hotel Moderne stationery, of a man-jaguar. Blood smeared the edges.

"Do you mind if I help you with this?" asked Gilbert. "This is getting interesting."

"Be my guest," said Howard.

"It's okay with John?" said Gilbert.

"If it doesn't impact the budget, John's okay with everything."

Gilbert tapped the portrait. Leopard spots all over. "That's what Sally Santa Cruz saw, right?" he said.

"A dead ringer," said Howard.

"So the same guy did both?" asked Gilbert.

"Maybe," said Howard.

"So . . . if there's a particular individual who has a grudge against both George and Moe, and who's fond of leopard-print T-shirts, he might be your man," said Gilbert.

Howard shook his head. "It's a long shot," he said. "There's no established link between George and Moe. They didn't even know each other. And we think Paolo Lopez did George Lescuyer anyway. Lopez is a major Puerto Rican kingpin. George helped us put him away. We think Lopez arranged the hit on George from inside prison. I doubt Moe has anything to do with Lopez. Or with George, for that matter. Moe is strictly small potatoes. He helps us bust street guys. Proving a connection with leopard spots is going to be tough."

Gilbert gestured at the sketch. "But you think there might be something here or else you wouldn't have shown it to me."

"Yes."

Just then, Howard's boss, John, called Howard into his office to talk about the Mariana Relós case. Howard sighed.

"I've got to go," he said. "Our investigation's at a sensitive stage."

This gave Gilbert a chance to review the George Lescuyer file in more detail.

He gazed at the blood-smeared picture of the man-jaguar, the *kanaima*. Crazy. Moe and George, both done by a guy in a leopard-print T-shirt? A connection? As Howard said, it was a long shot. He memorized the case file: George's height, weight, age, street address, et cetera, et cetera. He checked the suspect list, read about Paolo Lopez, memorized Paolo's particulars: prior arrests, convictions, street address, et cetera, et cetera. Then went into George's cause of death, two gunshot wounds to the abdomen—a guy might live long enough to draw a quick sketch of a man-jaguar. Lycanthropy was alive and well in the Andes, not just on

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late-night television. But where could Gilbert go with a man-jaguar, and how did it tie Moe and George together?

One weak theory: Moe and George were connected to each other only as cabby and fare. How to confirm this? He thought for a moment. With Moe's run sheets, how else? At this point, he was willing to try anything if it got him back to the golf course faster.

"Justin, I need a favor," he said. "I need you to call Crown Cab."

"Sure," said Justin.

Crown Cab faxed Moe's smudgy run sheets twenty minutes later, a stack of them going back six months.

Gilbert immediately saw George Lescuyer's posh Coral Gables address written on the list several times. Cabby and fare, just as he thought. But wait a minute. The entries were written under Suzanne's name, not George's. Suzanne, George's supermodel wife. Her destination—a big surprise. Northwest 17 Avenue, Paolo Lopez's place in North Miami Beach. Suzanne Lescuyer, late of the runway, one of Moe's regulars, now up to the kingpin's place, connecting George to Moe, Moe to Lopez. Moe's neat schoolboy handwriting as good as damned the former model as a possible culprit in all this.

Maybe he and Howard would have lunch at the club after all. He had conjectures. He had theories. And they all pointed to a salmon steak in an almond and tartar sauce, an endive and tangerine salad, and a glass of California white at a nice patio table overlooking the eighteenth green by the end of the day. Now if only he could improve his damn stroke.

"Did you know George Lescuyer at all?" he asked Justin.

Justin looked up from his work. "Sure," he said. "He was one of our top informants. A rich guy. Ran bets for Lopez. Fingered Lopez on the Vega murder. Chain-smoked. An older guy fond of turquoise blazers, big rings, and European sports cars."

Gilbert checked the run sheets further. One of them was missing. Which one? The one from the date of George Lescuyer's murder. Interesting.

"Did you know Suzanne Lescuyer as well?" he asked Justin.

"Yes."

"Is she a suspect in George's murder?"

"Not yet."

"What's she like?"

"Tall. Fast."

"Fast?" said Gilbert.

"She walks fast. I can never keep up with her."

A fast walker. Somehow that fit. Habitual fast walkers were bound to get impatient with their spouses from time to time, sneak off to North Miami Beach addresses two or three times a week, and conduct adulterous affairs with Puerto Rican kingpins.

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When Howard came out of John's office fifteen minutes later, Gilbert showed him Moe's run sheets. "Look what I found," he said.

Howard glanced over them. "We knew she went up there every other week to collect bets," he said. "But three times a week? Uh-uh. No way. This we didn't know. And the missing run sheet? I don't like it at all."

"Why don't we drive to Coral Gables and talk to her?" said Gilbert. "Nothing like a surprise visit."

They drove to Suzanne's place on Alhambra Drive, a white stucco twenty-room villa with a red-tile roof and palm trees. A white Mercedes with a gold hood ornament stood in the drive.

They found Suzanne at home. She was tall, blond, the human equivalent of that Mercedes in the drive, wearing summer white, a gold chain around her neck. She looked tired. Prune-colored half-moons darkened the skin under each eye. Age had made an impact on the former cover girl.

"I'm sorry," she said when they told her Moe was dead, murdered.

She looked at Moe's run sheets. She didn't deny her visits to Lopez. She said she had a thing for Paolo, that George didn't care because George had a thing for another woman, that's how their marriage worked.

"But if you think I had anything to do with George's murder," she said, "or Moe's, for that matter, think again. George and I lived separate lives. Our marriage, right from the start, was a business proposition, nothing more. He needed a wife. As a social necessity. I liked the lifestyle. I was fond of him. But I didn't love him. He knew that. He was perfectly okay with Paolo. Why he crossed Paolo, I don't know. That was his own business. I didn't pry. And the Vega murder? I stayed away from that. I warned George not to testify, told him Paolo was our friend, but George can be an idiot sometimes. He knew Paolo would do him. That's who you should be talking to. Paolo's the one who did George, not me."

"And who did Moe?" asked Gilbert.

She reached for her cigarettes. "I've known Moe a long time," she said. "He's a Miami fixture. He's discreet. I call the cab company, and I always ask for Moe. He knows how to keep his mouth shut. I'm sorry he's dead. But I didn't have anything to do with that one, either. Why would I kill Moe, a sweet old guy like that? I loved Moe. I'm sorry he's dead. I'll send flowers to his funeral." She stuck a cigarette in her mouth and lit it with a careless flick of her lighter. "Look, I'm tired," she said. "I need my afternoon nap. The only reason I opened the door for you guys in the first place was because I thought you had information about George's murder. Otherwise, talk to Paolo again."

On the way back to headquarters, Gilbert had conjectures. He had theories. But he doubted if any of them would lead to lunch at

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the club anytime soon. A sweet old guy. It was beginning to bug him. He was actually starting to like Moe, feel sorry for him, shot in the head after all that Holocaust crap. And he wasn't at all satisfied with Suzanne. He spelled it out for Howard.

"We've got Moe taking Suzanne to Paolo's love nest two or three times a week," he said. "Then we've got the run sheet from the day of the murder missing. Moe's a seller of information. He's been with you guys doing that for a long time. He's always taking Suzanne everywhere. She calls the cab company, and she always asks for Moe. That's what she said. What if Moe took Suzanne to the Hotel Moderne the night of the murder? He knows how to keep his mouth shut, but what if he decided he wasn't going to keep it shut this time? What if she arranged her husband's hit on Paolo's behalf, and hired some guy in a leopard-print T-shirt to do it for her? Suzanne and the *kanaima* are both in Moe's cab. They go in, they come out, and Moe puts two and two together. He has that run sheet as incriminating evidence. He sells it to them."

Howard considered. "I wouldn't put it past him," he said. "He had a lot of chutzpah for an old guy."

"If he sold her that run sheet, maybe we might find something reflective of that in his bank account."

Howard considered again. "It's worth a try. We'll order his bank records."

"And while we're at it," said Gilbert, "we should order Suzanne's as well. If she was shelling out, we might see it in her bank account, too."

Moe's bank records came first. "Look at this," said Gilbert. "He's got two anomalous deposits, one month apart, one thousand dollars apiece. Looks as if he was going to charge her on a monthly basis."

Suzanne Lescuyer's bank records slithered from the fax machine fifteen minutes later. They made a curious croaking sound, as if one of the gears inside the machine was broken. Howard lifted them from the tray and had a look. Gilbert peered over his brother's shoulder. He immediately saw what he was looking for. Dips in Suzanne's account corresponded to rises in Moe's.

"See?" said Gilbert. "He was blackmailing her. And look at this. Two fifteen-thousand-dollar withdrawals. The first withdrawal corresponds to the date of George's murder. The second withdrawal is a few days before Moe's murder. Fifteen grand. Isn't that the going price?" Gilbert sighed apprehensively. "This is really starting to bug me, Howard. The *kanaima* came for George. The *kanaima* came for Moe. You're the one who put Lopez behind bars. Suzanne's organizing hits for Lopez. Lopez wants revenge, I'm convinced of it." He couldn't stop his big-brother worry. "He'll send the *kanaima* after you next. This guy in the leopard-print T-shirt."

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Howard dismissed the notion with a wave of his hand. "Don't worry," he said. He pulled his blazer aside and revealed his Beretta nine. "Here, kitty, kitty."

"Did Moe have his own territory?" asked Gilbert. "Maybe we should talk to some of his cabby buddies to see if they know anything."

"The Marriott Hotel," said Howard. "Him and his cronies. They wait in line to pick up fares. And while they do, it's social hour."

But before they could drive to the Marriott, John called Howard into his office again.

"The D.A.'s making a nuisance of himself over some of our Mariana Relós evidence," Howard told Gilbert. "This may take awhile. Why don't you go down to the hotel and talk to some of the cabbies yourself?"

So Gilbert got in Howard's car and drove down to the Marriott by himself.

He found cabs of every description, from every company, at the taxi stand out front. The cabbies, mostly old men, stood outside their vehicles. One old guy wearing powder-blue polyester slacks and white loafers kept glancing at Gilbert. *Am I such an easy mark?* wondered Gilbert. Did he look like a cop, even in his holiday clothes? He took a self-conscious glance at his get-up. He wore a tennis jersey and a pair of blue slacks. He looked like a normal guy. Why did that old schmuck keep looking at him? He walked over to the geriatric cabby. Might as well start with him. He was going to have to talk to all of them anyway.

Gilbert started by telling the old guy he was Howard's brother, a detective from Toronto, and that he was helping out on Moe's case.

"You *look* like Howard," said the cabby. "I couldn't stop staring at you."

"I noticed."

The cabby, who introduced himself as Yogi, told Gilbert he didn't have to talk to the other guys.

"I know all about it," he said. "I heard it broadcast live on police radio. I have information about it. I was going to drive down and tell you guys, but I got scared. Paolo Lopez has guys all over the place. Paolo plays for keeps." Talking as if he was really nervous, looking across the street, up and down the sidewalk, out at the traffic, in every car window. "I didn't want to go down to headquarters because he has punks down there, too. I was hoping one of you might show up here instead."

Yogi took out a pack of Winstons and stuck one in his mouth. He didn't light it. He let it hang. He spoke about Moe. The cigarette bobbed up and down like the needle on a polygraph machine.

"Moe tried to put the squeeze on Suzanne Lescuyer after she

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killed her husband for Lopez." So there it was, as he'd thought, not Lopez, not Suzanne, but the two of them acting together. "Suzanne's a real ice queen." Yogi was an old guy, and he talked like an old guy, spoke like someone in a 1930s gangster movie, that's how ancient he was. "She was playing the hanky-panky with Lopez, stood to cash in if she brokered the hit on her husband for him." The way the guy talked—like Cagney in *Public Enemy*—Gilbert was starting to feel sorry for him. "Moe was there that night at the Hotel Moderne. The ice queen was his fare. She had a young crackerjack with her, a real hotshot, a guy in a leopard-print T-shirt." Yes, the basics were there, the grim outlines of a conspiracy, conveyed to Gilbert in the street slang of a bygone era, still amounting to the same thing, Murder One.

"Leopard-boy was packing heat," continued Yogi. "Suzanne had Moe wait for them. George was upstairs with another dame at the time. Suzanne and leopard-boy went up, they came back, and leopard-boy had blood on his hand. Moe knew he had a money-maker. He ran a badger game on Suzanne. Monthly grabs of a G-note each. Sold her his run sheet from the night of the murder. I told him he was off his hinges. A couple weeks later, he got scared, told me he saw leopard-boy everywhere. I said to him, Moe, why don't you go to the cops? And he said, Yogi, I will. But I guess leopard-boy got to him before he could get to the cops."

Speech spiced with cornball anachronisms, but it conveyed the essential fact: The *kanaima* stalked. Yogi's eyes misted over. He pulled out a crumpled handkerchief and blew his nose. Gilbert saw that Yogi grieved, that he was stranded here on this hard, bright, futuristic Miami boulevard of the twenty-first century, no longer a man of his time, lost and sad, especially without his best friend Moe around anymore.

The next day Gilbert sat in Howard's kitchen by himself. Howard, finally admitting the danger was real—that Paolo Lopez might be out for revenge—drove with John and Justin to the penitentiary to talk to the Puerto Rican kingpin, cut him a break if he helped put Suzanne behind bars. Trish, Howard's wife, had gone to work. Gilbert's niece and nephew were in school. The case, thanks to Gilbert, was as good as wrapped up. While he waited for his brother to return from the penitentiary, he read the *Miami Herald* at the kitchen table over a cup of coffee and a toasted cinnamon-raisin bagel. The birds sang outside. He was just starting to read the latest on the Miami Dolphins when the birds stopped singing.

He didn't believe in the *kanaima*. But he was going to take Sally Santa Cruz's warning seriously: When the birds stopped singing, you knew the *kanaima* was somewhere around.

He closed the paper, careful not to rustle the pages, walked

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down the hall to the master bedroom, opened Howard's dresser drawer, and took out his brother's extra gun. He walked back to the kitchen, sat at the table, rested the gun on his thigh, pointed the barrel over his knee, and waited.

He heard the side door pop open, forced by a crowbar. He got ready. *Here, kitty, kitty.*

He sat there until the *kanaima* appeared at the kitchen door.

Not the terror of the Andes, but just a kid, eighteen or nineteen years old, with leopard spots dyed into his blond hair. He looked startled to find Gilbert sitting there so calmly at the kitchen table. Today the *kanaima* wasn't wearing his leopard-print T-shirt. He was wearing a white one instead. He held a gun, an ivory-handled revolver that looked as if it'd been around forever, a showpiece with a lot of nickel plating.

"You Howard?" asked the *kanaima.*

"Son, I'd advise you to put that firearm down before you hurt someone."

The boy's voice hardened. "I said, are you Howard?"

Gilbert didn't make any sudden moves, just started firing, quickly, repeatedly, steadying the gun against his knee, the bullets ripping into the *kanaima*'s legs, crippling him in a second. The poor kid collapsed. Not killed, just declawed. What choice did Gilbert have when he was face-to-face with the notorious man-jaguar of the Venezuelan Highlands?

Gilbert and Howard were at last back at the golf course. They had to be careful. A water trap threatened only yards away. Gilbert got down on one knee and studied his shot.

"Ruiz was his name?" he said.

"Yes," said Howard. "He's going to be okay. You did what you had to do, Barry. I visited him in the hospital this morning. He gave Suzanne up. He said Suzanne hired him for both George and Moe. We arrested Suzanne this morning. She's denying everything. But Yogi's agreed to step forward. And Ruiz and Lopez are going to testify as well. She's going to jail for a long time."

So there it was. Tales of the Supernatural. What he did on his Florida vacation. Just a poor dumb kid with a gun, a runway model who walked too fast, an angry kingpin who wanted revenge, and Moe, a man with too much chutzpah for his own good.

Gilbert stood up, was about to take his swing, but then his brother's pager beeped. Not again, he thought.

Howard unclipped his pager and, without even looking at the number, threw it into the water trap. No, definitely not again.

"I hate cats," said Howard. "I always have." ●

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The Moving-Picture Mystery

by Ian Morson

When the young French doctor returned, Albert Potter thought he looked *agitated. Noticing the* Englishman's stare, he begged his guest to excuse his state of mind.

"You will have to forgive me, Monsieur Potter. I was attending to a patient. He gets a little . . . agitated when the wind howls in the trees. He thinks it is the Devil come to take him away. I have given him a sedative, and he will sleep now."

Dr. Gaston was a young man in his twenties—too young, Albert Potter thought, to be in charge of even a French lunatic asylum. But then who, with a reputation already earned, or a family to keep, would be prepared to hide himself away in this crumbling mausoleum of a place in the middle of nowhere? The good doctor, on the other hand, seemed to find his charges fascinating, and had explained he was writing a thesis on the causes of neurasthenia and dementia praecox.

"Now, please, tell me about this man you are seeking."

Uneasy at the predatory glitter in the doctor's eyes, Potter tried to pull together in his mind all the events of the last few days. His own actions of the last few hours had not been all that rational, and he did not wish to seem entirely mad. After all, he was supposed to have been making sense of Louis Le Prince's actions. Potter realised at that very moment that, though he had traced the man's last journey meticulously, he had not sufficiently researched his habits and peculiarities. Nor his extraordinary invention, and

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the possible enemies it had created.

His mind drifted back to the meeting that had brought him to this remote asylum on the edge of a village that didn't even merit a stop on the main steam-train line between Dijon and Paris . . .

Albert Potter had been recommended to Mrs. Le Prince as a young man of good character, forceful manner, and dogged determination who would find her husband if he was to be found. But more important to Potter than all those encomiums was the undisclosed reason for his proposed services—the state of his pocket. He was in dire need of funds. His remuneration as a clerk at the Colonial Office was satisfactory for a single man such as he was at present. But Albert had other ambitions, and they chiefly concerned the beautiful and well-connected Rosalind Wells.

Of course, he was no fool. He knew he was short and ungainly, with a head too big for his body. Indeed he had winced when once he had accidentally overheard Rosalind referring to him, to one of her friends, as "that tadpole of a man." But his ego was as large as his body was small, and when he set his mind to something, he usually got what he wanted. And Rosalind Wells was what he wanted.

So now he found himself in need of funds, and when someone told him of Mrs. Le Prince and her search for her missing husband, he had traveled immediately up to Leeds. Private investigation had always piqued his curiosity, and the opportunity for travel this matter afforded was alluring. Besides, Rosalind Wells was in Leeds talking to trades-union organisers for the Fabian Society. Later, he would surprise her with his presence, but first he had to address the matter in hand.

"You say your husband simply disappeared while on the Dijon-to-Paris train, Madame Le Prince?"

"I am as English as you are, Mr. Potter, so it's Mrs. Le Prince, please. Or indeed, Elizabeth, if you prefer."

Potter beamed at the presumed widow, detecting in her voice something of a Northern accent. "A native of these parts, then?"

Elizabeth Le Prince smiled coyly and fidgeted a little with the beaded reticule on her lap. She wore a fashionable cream blouse and full skirt of deepest pink, edged in white lace, with a matching bolero jacket. Potter guessed that her dress was a statement of her belief that her husband still lived. No widow's weeds for this woman. Potter reassured her that it was possible her missing husband was still alive. But his private opinion was that, after six months, perhaps Le Prince, even alive, had no wish to return to his wife. Other attractions, principally female, must have been the cause of his disappearance. Elizabeth Le Prince seemed to read Potter's mind.

"I am certain that my husband hasn't left me for another woman, Mr. Potter."

"Albert, please."

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"He was—is—entirely faithful to me, Albert. I would know if he had not been."

Potter wondered how many women had said that of secretly philandering husbands just before the bombshell landed. But he shelved that line of enquiry for the moment in deference to the woman's feelings.

"You say that Mr. Le Prince was in France on family business? What was that exactly?"

"He was collecting his share of a small inheritance, I believe."

So he was not short of cash, and dodging creditors by hiding away somewhere. Quite the opposite—he was a good mark for a robbery, in fact. But if he had been murdered during a robbery, then where was his body, and his baggage? The man had apparently disappeared into the blue—lock, stock, and barrel. The Great Maskelyne could not have performed better in his magic act on the stage of the Leeds Hippodrome.

"What was Mr. Le Prince working on when he left you . . . for France, that is? I understand he was a photographer."

The woman smiled in a proprietorial manner.

"My husband was . . . *is* a genius, Mr. Potter. He was making moving pictures."

Potter didn't fancy becoming Dr. Gaston's next guinea pig. Therefore, so as not to be thought mad, he did not tell this doctor of lunatics of Le Prince's secret work with moving pictures. Until a few days ago, he would have thought anyone mad who had claimed to have seen what he then had with his own eyes.

In fact, two matters had disturbed Albert Potter about his trip to Leeds. One was that he had missed his surprise rendezvous with Rosalind Wells. She had apparently cut her business short and disappeared God knows where—he hoped not as finally as had Le Prince. And the other—and a much more powerful one, he had to admit—was that of the remarkable images he had watched in the darkened room that had been Louis Le Prince's workshop. Like any red-blooded male, Potter had seen the jerky simulation of movement that presented itself down the periscope of a hand-cranked machine on the end of Southend Pier. But those flickering cards that always ended frustratingly before the lady had fully disrobed (he guessed because the attendant had removed the last cards of the sequence for his own delectation)—those simulacra were as nothing to the image that Mrs. Le Prince had projected onto the wall of the curtained room.

It had been as though a window had suddenly opened onto the street beyond the blank wall, cleaving it apart. A foggy, greyish window, but a window nonetheless. And Potter sat dumbfounded as the mundane street scene of horse-drawn trams and people—real people—scurried across the wall. They moved in a perfect imitation

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of reality, then jerked back to where they had been and scurried again, following the self-same route as before. Mesmerised, he watched them repeat their passage through time again and again, asking Mrs. Le Prince, like some all-powerful God, to cause their movements to be repeated innumerable times until she was afraid the reel of collodion-sensitive paper would buckle and catch fire.

Sunk in thought as he recalled this phenomenon, Potter picked at the remains of the cold collation that a surly servant had brought him at Dr. Gaston's behest. He left it to the doctor to break the silence.

"You say you followed in the unfortunate Monsieur Le Prince's footsteps, and they brought you here to my . . . institution?"

Potter nodded, and began to explain that he had started by traveling to Dijon, and speaking to the last man known to have seen Louis Le Prince alive. His brother.

As Albert Potter shook M. Le Prince's hand at the Dijon station, he was aware of just how uncanny it was to be so exactly repeating the actions of the man he sought. Le Prince's brother, who coincidentally was named Albert, too, but pronounced in the Continental way, now stood before him seeing him off on the Paris-bound train. He had not been able to help Potter much at all, merely confirming that Louis had been a little nervous and overexcited.

"But I put that down to the, er . . . camera device he was carrying with him."

"Camera device?"

Albert Le Prince grimaced, the wrinkling of his nose conveying the condescension with which he clearly viewed his sibling. Potter had been painfully aware of this enmity from the moment he met Le Prince's brother. Indeed, it had crossed his mind that Albert Le Prince could be considered a suspect in the possible murder. He would need to check out further whether Louis Le Prince did indeed receive the inheritance he had traveled to Dijon to collect. He turned no more than a polite ear to the man's prattling.

"My brother was . . . obsessed with photography. He had a perfectly good job working for his brother-in-law's engineering firm. They manufactured wallpaper, you know. But he immersed himself in his . . . hobby of taking pictures. Quite literally immersed—more often than not he was up to his elbows in all sorts of smelly and dangerous chemicals. His latest tomfoolery was to do with making these photographs move, like some . . . peep show."

Potter refrained from telling the brother that it was not tomfoolery—he had seen the magic performed himself. He was reminded of the continuous loop that was the film he had watched with Mrs. Le Prince. Her husband had trapped a moment in time which could be repeated over and over again, making each action on the screen susceptible to being studied from different angles until every iota of

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information was drained from it. It would have made his detecting job so much easier if he could have done the same with Le Prince's disappearance. *If someone had been standing at the station, as Potter was now, six months on, at 2:42 P.M. on the sixteenth of September, 1890, taking a moving picture of Le Prince shaking his brother's hand—as Potter was now—matters might have been different.*

"And you think this camera was for taking moving pictures?"

M. Le Prince snorted. "You have not been taken in by my brother's trickery as well, have you? Of course it could not take moving pictures. You might as well suggest the Mona Lisa could rise from her chair and depart the frame in which she sits. He said there was just one more problem to solve before it worked properly."

A supercilious sneer contorted Le Prince's face, and he tapped the side of his nose conspiratorially.

"There was always just one more problem for Louis to solve. I doubt that this one was the last, though he claimed to have come to a solution."

The clanking giant steamed into the station, and for a while the noise of the massive engine's passing prevented any form of conversation between the two men. Then Albert Le Prince was all hustle and bustle, apparently all too eager to get rid of the meddling Englishman. Should he be added to Potter's extremely short list of suspects? As he climbed on board the train, Potter felt a hand placed lightly on his arm. He turned to look back, hoping for a last-minute revelation.

Le Prince grinned fatuously at him. "Please try not to disappear like Louis."

Potter hung off the rear of the carriage as the train pulled away, irritated by the man's flippancy. After all, his brother's body might still be lying unburied by the track-side even now. A final thought occurred to him, and he called out to the receding figure.

"What was the problem he claimed to have solved? Did Louis say?"

He could barely make out what Albert Le Prince was saying through the echoes of the engine in the cavernous station.

"Yes . . . new medium . . . celluloid . . . from Dr. Marey, in Paris."

At the time this meant nothing to Potter, and he settled in his seat, trying to put himself inside the mind of Le Prince.

He knew he was being followed from the moment he boarded the 2:42 P.M. train for Paris. He fingered his stiff celluloid collar, feeling the dampness of his fear. The station at Dijon was bustling with people, and everyone seemed engrossed in their own business. The accidental intersection of all their lives held no significance for anyone. But there was one particular fellow traveler—a tall, thin man enveloped in a long Inverness-cape coat—who was always hovering just on the limits of his vision. He could see the man over his brother's shoulder, as he shook his hand in farewell. Then, as he

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made his way to the platform, there was the man again, lurking behind the line of pillars that supported the ornate station roof. As if to confirm his fears, the man turned away just as he fixed him with a stare, tipping his felt bowler over his angular features.

Then, in a cloud of hissing steam, the engine pulled in, and doors were flung open as the train began to disgorge its passengers. For a moment he lost sight of the man in the milling crowd, and he waved to his brother, then concentrated on seeking out a free seat. He passed his bag to the porter on the steps of the nearest carriage, and pulled himself up on the handrail, keeping the box he was carrying to himself for safety. He suddenly had a sense of being watched, and looked along the length of the train uneasily. Several people were mounting the steps up to the other carriages, rushing now to escape a sudden flurry of rain. There was no sign of the tall, thin man. Then, leaning out of the nearest window, he spotted a flapping cape through the clouds of steam. The man was making a decisive move down the platform in order to get in the same carriage that he himself had chosen. He hugged the exquisitely carpentered box closer to his chest, feeling the metal mount of the lens pressing into him. He hunched his shoulders as he moved along the carriage, trying in vain to hide, for he stood well over six feet.

The porter was already stowing his other hand baggage—a well-worn carpetbag valise that had survived the rough handling of careless North American porters—on the luggage rack above an empty seat. He didn't want to sit down—he felt more like getting off the train and running for his life. The porter looked at him curiously, and waved an officious hand at the vacant seat. He recognised the imperious nature of all petty officials from this the country of his birth, and knew he would have to comply. Reluctantly, he sat down, reaching into his pocket for some money—a tip being the inevitable next part of the joint conspiracy. Pleased at his control of the passenger, the porter took the proffered coin and turned his officious attentions to the other sheeplike passengers.

For a moment, he fidgeted nervously, rubbing the irritating open sore on his left hand, making it bleed again. Then he steeled himself to look up from his studious examination of his rain-spattered shoes. The tall, thin man, who had run the length of the platform to get in the same coach, was now sitting himself down right across from him! The man was brushing the rain from the shoulders of his cape, and smiled as their eyes met. And what a smile! Disdain, complicity, pity—all epithets seemed inadequate to describe it. He struggled to find the right word, and eventually settled on the right one.

Predatory.

The man's hook of a nose reminded him of the buzzards that drifted on the updrafts over the Yorkshire crags, looking for easy pickings. He hunched in on himself and racked his brain for what his next move should be.

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Despite all his attempts at entering the mind of the man he sought, Albert kept drifting off to his amatory campaign concerning Rosalind Wells. Potter had come across her at a meeting of the Fabians three years earlier, and had been bowled over by her imperious manner. And her shapely figure and big brown eyes. She was somewhat German-looking—a trait that was fashionable amongst the intellectuals with whom Albert fancied he belonged. So Potter had pressed his suit in his usual blunt way. He was at first mortified that she professed not to be aware of this, but that had not deterred him, nor blunted the ardour of his campaign. He had known from the start that he was the perfect match for her—it would just take some time to convince her of the fact. What the eye saw was not always the full picture.

He gazed admiringly at his own reflection in the window, only half noticing the buildup of dark, heavy clouds outside the carriage. His rather short torso and legs obscured, the image that stared back was of a man with a thick mane of hair and luxuriant moustache and goatee beard. He preened a little, then began to doze off in the stuffy carriage.

He was beginning to sweat heavily, and his head pounded in rhythm with the thump of the train's motion along the track. His persecutor sat diagonally opposite him, mocking him with a leer every time he looked up. The sharp-faced man had not removed his curly-brimmed bowler, and a shadow hung over his brow. But it did not conceal the man's eyes. They glowed like red-hot coals at the fiery base of a furnace.

He clutched his stiff collar, trying to loosen it as his breathing became more and more difficult. His heart pounded faster in his chest, and his lungs strained to draw in the suddenly thick, clammy air of the railway carriage. He was suffocating—why did the other passengers not feel the same? Everyone else in the carriage seemed oblivious to his condition. In fact, he realised they were blurring out of focus as if seen through a badly adjusted camera lens. He blinked his eyes, trying to clear his vision, but it was no use. The only face he could see clearly was that of the tall, thin man opposite as he leaned forward and said something to him. The words were lost in their own echoes, and he squeezed his eyes shut to close out the man's mocking face. A series of juddering crashes jarred through his body, and he almost cried out loud in fear.

His eyes flew open.

Then he realised the commotion was merely the train crossing the familiar set of junctions in the outer suburbs of Dijon. Almost at once the train settled to a more soothing rhythm, and he composed himself. He told himself he was being foolish—it was mere coincidence that this innocent man had seemed to dog his footsteps

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around the station. Like him, the man had been waiting for the Paris train, so it was only reasonable to assume they would have both been in the same places at the same time. Even the man's dash for the very carriage he had chosen could be explained by his wish to avoid the downpour which had suddenly swept the uncovered platform further up the stationary train.

No, he was imagining things, without a doubt.

In an effort to normalise the situation, he even forced himself to look directly at the man and squeeze a smile onto his parched, dry lips. The man spoke, but again the words did not register.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I was saying, you look a little pale, a little sickly. Perhaps that box on your lap is restricting your circulation. It does look very heavy. Here, let me take it from you."

His loud protests, as he clutched the box even more tightly to his chest, keeping it from the outstretched hands of the man, cut through the other passengers' indifference. Now everyone in the carriage was giving him a curious and pitying look. His moment of calm was shattered, and he pressed as far back in his seat as possible, wishing for it to swallow him up. His mind raced once more as he plotted a possible escape from the tall, thin man, who was firmly fixed once again in his mind as the destroyer of all his dreams, the thief of all his hopes.

Potter woke with a start as the train rumbled over a set of points. He had been dreaming, and couldn't shake off the image of Le Prince being pursued by someone. A man who wanted Le Prince's invention. If Le Prince had truly created a moving-picture camera, and solved the problem of the medium on which to fix the images, then there would be those who wanted it. Either to claim it as their own, or to stifle it and promote their own invention. Mrs. Le Prince had said the American inventor Edison was working in the same field as her husband.

If Potter was to solve this riddle, though, he had to work out how Le Prince, or his supposed assailant, come to that, had disappeared into thin air. Potter had got off the train at every station on the way down from Paris to Dijon, and spoken briefly with each stationmaster. Every one had been certain—as they had during the police enquiry only weeks after the disappearance—that no one resembling Louis Le Prince had alighted at their station. Now Potter was traveling back along the same line, no wiser after his interview with Albert Le Prince than he had been at the start of it all.

As the train rumbled through the peaceful countryside, he felt more and more agitated. The carriage was gradually emptying, as at each station the train stopped, and people got up and left. Soon, he would be left alone with the tall, thin man in his voluminous cape.

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And he could not begin to imagine what was on the man's mind, for his dark, glowing eyes betrayed nothing but emptiness. He felt pinned to his seat by their steely gaze, and when the train slowed for the next station, and their final two traveling companions rose to leave, he could do nothing. He wanted to leap up, grasp the elderly couple's arms, and convince them to stay. Perhaps he could suggest they alter their plans to get out at . . . where was it? He spotted the station sign as the train juddered to a halt.

Sens. They were halfway to Paris already. Why didn't they stay with him and enjoy the pleasures of the capital? If they stayed on with him to the terminus, he would treat them to a meal at Maxim's. And pay for a stay in a luxurious hotel for the night, if only they would stay on the train. Who wanted to finish their day in dreary old Sens? He would even offer to take their picture with his new camera—immortalise them on Dr. Marey's new celluloid film. His pleas boiled in his brain, but remained unspoken, and the elderly couple descended slowly from the carriage, and were gone. The heavy camera box felt like an unbearable burden on his lap.

But their departure left him with an idea—a final defence. He surreptitiously turned the camera around on his lap until the two lenses in the front of the box pointed across the carriage at his tormentor. Though the stock inside the box was brittle, unlike the new celluloid, he had to hope it might work. He peered in the viewfinder set in the top, looking steadily at the image inverted in the little brass frame. Strangely, the intervention of the lenses between him and the man calmed him, as though the lens had captured and reduced the man to manageable proportions. He was able for the first time to look directly at him. No longer were his eyes so demonic, his posture so threatening. He was simply a tall, nondescript man sitting on a train, bored by the long journey, and anxious to return to his family in Paris.

Boldly, he began to turn the brass handle set in the side of the oak box.

The carriage was gradually emptying, as at each station the train stopped and people got up and left. He spoke to as many of his fellow passengers as possible within the limitations of his schoolboy French, and their reticence. Some of the people he spoke to traveled on the line regularly, but none could recall Le Prince as he described him—a tall, dark man with luxuriant Dundreary whiskers carrying a large box with brass fittings.

"*Six mois auparavant? Non, c'est impossible.* There are times I cannot even recall my own wife's name. Though that can be an advantage sometimes. Eh, monsieur?"

Potter was glad when the toothless and odorous peasant who wished to regale him with his amatory exploits on market days finally reached his stop. He looked out at the station, wondering if

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Le Prince had got this far.

Sens. An elegantly dressed man got on and sat opposite him.

The rain was teeming down now, and heavy droplets of water tracked slowly across the window. First they ran diagonally, driven by the forward motion of the train. He was only half aware of them out of the corner of his eye, for his gaze was still mainly on the inverted image in the viewfinder. He cranked the handle knowing that the film would soon be finished, fearing that the spell might then be broken. There was a burning sensation in his mouth and throat, and he craved a drink to soothe it. His heart was pounding once again in his chest, and he felt faint. He glanced up, and the man's eyes once again glowed murderously. He had to avert his gaze, and saw that the gobs of rainwater on the window were tracking almost vertically.

The train was coming to a halt.

The binding of the brakes woke Albert Potter from a doze, and he grasped the moquette-covered arm of his seat tightly as the carriage juddered to a halt. The elegant man opposite pitched forwards involuntarily.

He held his arm protectively round his moving-picture camera as the train lurched to a stop. And in the viewfinder he saw the tall, thin man leaping towards him across the carriage, his Inverness cape flapping like the wings of a bat. There was only one more thing he could do.

Potter looked out of the window onto darkness, seeing nothing more than his own reflection. On this occasion the image was of perplexity.

"Monsieur. Please, why have we stopped? There is no station."

The elegantly dressed Parisian opposite, who had nearly been thrown into Potter's lap by the motion of the train, brushed off the dust that had settled on his grey, fur-trimmed pilot coat from the rack above his head and smiled wearily. He explained with a resigned nod of his coiffured head that the train always stopped here.

"It is for another train—where the lines cross. The driver knows he must stop, but it seems the signal always comes as a surprise to him. Hence the . . ."

A vague Gallic wave of his wrist finished the sentence, describing with a twirl of the fingers the abrupt stop to which they had come. Potter could well imagine that it would have thrown an unwary passenger facing the rear of the train out of his seat. He was glad his fellow traveler had braced himself, and done nothing more than steady himself with a hand on Potter's knee.

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It was as he settled back in his seat that he realised the Frenchman had said something quite important. Potter lunged for his traveling bag, and staggered to his feet just as he felt the train start up again. Under the astonished gaze of the man, he flung open the carriage door and dropped down into the darkness.

He stumbled as he fell down onto the track-side, twisting his ankle. It buckled under him, and both his carpetbag and camera flew from his grasp, and disappeared into the darkness. He continued to tumble head over heels down the slippery embankment, bushes tearing at his clothes. His fall was broken by his landing on something soft in the damp gully at the bottom of the slope. It was his own bag, which had burst open to disgorge his clothes into the gully. A dress shirt drifted away from him on the rising water in the muddy channel. He sat up, wiped the rain out of his eyes, and watched the lights of the train gliding away from him. He was now committed to his course of action.

Potter picked himself up out of the muddy ditch, and realised what a mad thing he had done. But he still reckoned it could be no less than Le Prince had done six months before. If the police had not been able to find any trace of him getting off at the stations down the line between Dijon and Paris, it stood to reason that this must have been the only possible place that Le Prince could have alighted. The elegant Parisian had said the train always stopped here. While it had stood waiting in the dark for the passage of another train on the down line, Le Prince must have, for whatever reason, jumped down from the carriage with his bag and moving-picture camera. Had he been fleeing from someone, and what had been his pursuer's motive?

Potter turned up the collar of his muddied overcoat, hefted his bag, and clambered out of the gully. He found himself on a rutted country road, and stood at the roadside, debating which way to follow it. Where would Le Prince have gone? While he stood considering this dilemma, he was aware of a glimmer of light flickering through the trees to his left, and thought at first it was a carriage coming his way. He determined to hail it, and hoped the driver would stop for a mud-covered madman who had just jumped off the Paris train in the middle of nowhere. Then he realised the apparent movement of the light was caused by the swaying of trees, whipped back and forth by the driving wind. The yellowish light was coming from the windows of a large house set far back in thick woodland.

He decided he needed to get out of the pouring rain, and walked along the road a few hundred yards until he found the driveway to the house. Two crumbling pillars loomed out of the darkness, both leaning at too precarious an angle to support the wrought-iron gates properly. These hung open, their bottom edges dug deep into

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the weed-covered driveway, clearly not having been moved for years. There was no indication on the pillars as to the name of the house, nor its owners. Potter hoped that, whoever they were, they would take pity on a damp and hungry traveler.

The driveway was as unkempt as the gateway, and Potter's only hope that the place was actually inhabited rested on the fact that he had seen lights in the upper rooms from the road. And as he approached the gloomy facade of the edifice, he was relieved to see at least one light still shining from one of the windows above the main portico. He was not so sure about wanting to place himself at the mercy of the inhabitants when he heard an unearthly scream emanating from the darkness above him.

When Potter had asked Doctor Gaston whether a tall, dark-haired man had appeared on the doorstep of his asylum six months ago, much in the same way he had done this night, Gaston had stared pensively into space for a long time. His eyes, when they had returned to stare at Potter, glittered darkly.

"I am afraid not. People very rarely choose to visit us voluntarily, you understand." He had smiled knowingly, and by way of further explanation waved his hand to take in the dark, desolate chateau. "The relatives of those patients who . . . " He strove to find a suitable word, one not tainted with the stain of incarceration. " . . . those patients . . . residing with us, pay as much as they can. But the upkeep of the chateau is so crippling that it is difficult to maintain it to the standards of its former residents. . . . "

Potter, almost dozing off at the drone of Gaston's monologue on the causes of madness, suddenly realised the doctor was making a suggestion about his search for Le Prince.

"You know, it is no surprise to me that this man you are seeking . . . "

"Le Prince."

" . . . Le Prince, disappeared. Little is known about the effects of cyanide on those who indulge in the science of photography."

Potter frowned.

"What has cyanide to do with this case, Doctor? Are you suggesting that Le Prince had been poisoned?"

Doctor Gaston smiled. "Let me explain. About forty years ago, a man called Archer discovered that a substance called collodion made an excellent surface for photographic images. In order to fix this image, a solution was required, and most photographers used a weak solution of cyanide of potassium, silver nitrate, and water. Unfortunately, this solution is highly poisonous, and should not be allowed to touch broken skin, nor should the fumes be inhaled. Many people have died as a result of their interest in taking photographs."

Potter remembered Albert Le Prince's comment about his brother's use of collodion, and being immersed in chemicals.

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"What are the symptoms of cyanide poisoning?"

"Initially, headaches, faintness, anxiety. Often the sufferer has a burning sensation in his mouth. Later, he will suffer attacks of excitement, anxiety, and increased heart rate."

"And finally?"

"Coma, convulsions, paralysis . . . and death. Inevitably—death."

"You seem to know a lot about the subject."

"Oh yes. I have been making a study of the progression of the symptoms, and have observed several research subjects in this very house."

Potter shuddered at the apparent callousness of the doctor, and his reference to the demented, poisoned souls as simply subjects for his research.

"Then, if he did jump from the train that day, what were his chances?"

The doctor sighed.

"If he tried to hide somewhere, and the later stages of cyanide poisoning took effect—heart arhythmia, respiratory depression—then he undoubtedly would have died a lonely and painful death."

"And I am wasting my time. Fancy imagining him pursued and murdered by rivals, when in fact he was simply being persecuted by his own deranged imagination."

"Not in the least. Our chance meeting has provided you with the most likely fate for the unfortunate Monsieur Le Prince. Break it to his wife gently." He leaned back in his chair. "Please, there is a village a kilometre down the road, Monsieur Potter—Pont-sur-Vanne—I will arrange for my assistant to take you there in the carriage."

When Potter made a token protest at the inconvenience, Dr. Gaston brushed it aside.

"It is better you do not stay here tonight. My patients can be . . . unsettled by strangers."

So it was Potter readily agreed to the doctor's offer of transport, as he now felt his search was over. He thought it likely that Le Prince, doped with accidental cyanide poisoning, had fallen from the train and been killed. At the very least, he would have been seriously injured, and perhaps had crawled away into the woods only to succumb to cyanide and the elements soon afterwards. He shivered at the thought that Le Prince's fate could easily have been his own.

It was thus with some relief that he took his leave of the doctor and his forbidding residence, looking back only briefly to see the man standing in front of the portico, lit by the flickering lantern he held above his head. Then Potter sighed and settled back in his seat, looking forward to finding a warm dry hotel in the nearby village.

Dr. Gaston, lantern in hand, waved goodbye to the Englishman, then mounted the steps back into his domain. He closed the creaky front door of the asylum against the elements. Taking a

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bunch of keys from his pocket, he carefully locked the door, turned, and crossed the vast, echoing hallway. The darkness hung heavy, like the cobwebs that adorned the upper reaches of the high ceiling, but the lantern cast enough light for the doctor to see his way. Besides, he knew the house like the back of his hand now. To one side of the still imposing staircase that curved up into the darkness of the upper floors there was a secret door made to resemble the wall in which it was cut. He fumbled another key on the ring into the lock and stepped through the door, closing it behind him.

He heard a very familiar shriek. Descending the stairs that took him down to part of the warren of cellars under the chateau, he stopped at another locked door. The moaning came from behind this door. There was a shutter in the upper part of the door, and he slid it gently back. He looked at his latest research subject, and felt firm in his resolution to harbour the secret of his existence. The worth to science, and to Gaston's reputation, would be inestimable. He watched as the lunatic repeated his strange compulsion over and over again.

The man with the bushy Dundreary whiskers, now somewhat obscured by the full growth of beard on his chin, stared wide-eyed in terror at the illuminated square cast on the wall of his cell. He appeared transfixed by what he saw. In the corner of the room lay an oak box, bound with brass. Unfortunately, the brass had not saved the contents of the box from destruction in some sort of accident. One that Gaston now knew as the man's leap from the Paris train. The box rattled when shaken, but the man refused to relinquish it.

The occupant of the room screamed, and the doctor slid the shutter closed. He knew the cycle was now going to be repeated over again. And he longed to know what the man saw on the wall, where there was only a feeble square of light cast by the lamp he insisted on keeping burning all hours of the day and night. A blank patch of yellow light that terrified him. The doctor shook his head in bewilderment.

Louis sat mesmerised by the projected image of his persecutor on the wall. It was as real as reality itself. Like so many times before, the tall, thin man in the Inverness cape was sitting opposite him on the train, fixing him with his steely eyes. They were alone in the carriage. Slowly, that eternal, predatory leer formed on his face, and his silent lips formed the words, "Give me the camera, Monsieur Le Prince." Louis's heart sank. He could not take his eyes off the man, trying as he had done so many times to fix the man's features with his gaze. But the image was blurred, and lost in shadow, like a poorly developed photograph, sitting hopelessly in a tray of fixative. The only hope was to add more cyanide of potassium to it. He stared, knowing what was coming next, anticipating the inevitable.

The image shook, just as the camera had when the train had braked sharply, and the tall, thin man threw himself at Louis. The

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man's face filled the screen as Louis swung the camera at his head, a sickening crunch jarring him to the elbow. Then the image shifted jerkily to a shot of the carriage door swinging open, and he was enveloped in the flapping wings of the man's cape. Under the dead weight of the body, Le Prince plunged into the darkness. He screamed. ●

A Case of Counterfeiting **(continued from page 100)**

Stephen King was less concerned with that kind of detail in his original story. *EQMM* published two issues in June of 1980, but neither bore the date "June, 1980" as the issue in his story does.

It was King's character John Shooter, played by John Turrurro, who posed the second most difficult prop problem for Howard Cummings and his crew. A Mississippi hayseed who feels he's been wronged, Shooter is willing to go to any ends to get justice. King's story called for Shooter to wear a signature wide-brimmed hat, and it was the production team's job to create one for Turturro. "John looks great in certain hats," Cummings told us. "But that was supposed to be sort of a Pilgrim's hat. The costume designer, Odette Gadoury, bought several hats of that style, but David Koepp [the director and screenwriter] wanted the brim to be exactly a certain length, because that silhouette is so important. When Shooter first appears, I insisted that the front door have a glass upper panel with a curtain on it, so that when he knocks on the door, all you see is the shape of the hat. David actually wanted the door to be solid. I think he related to Mort and he didn't want the guy to get in. But I thought, the first thing you see is the shadow. And so the hat was critical. It was very odd to put an Italian in a Pilgrim's hat. He ends up being very iconographic, like the magazine itself. Just to get that one costume took a lot of trial and error. And Odette really had to fine-tune the hat. Then we had to have several made, because the hat gets thrown all over the place."

The movie's settings, Cummings told me, presented an even bigger challenge than those props with their several versions. King chose terrain he was familiar with for the original novella—his home state of Maine. An eerie rural setting. But not a place you could go. Imagination was at work there as well, altering beyond recognition whatever real town or towns inspired the fictional "Tashmore" of the story, somewhere in the Maine woods.

When David Koepp scripted the film, he placed Mort Rainey in the town of "Tashmore Lake," somewhere in upstate New York, perhaps the Adirondacks or the Catskills, rather than in the Maine of King's story. "It fits with why Mort would have gotten published in Queen," Cummings said. "His connections were in that area. David Koepp wanted Mort Rainey to be out of place in the small town. He's this New Yorker in this little town. That

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doesn't work in Maine. So part of it is this poor guy has not only gotten divorced, but he has to live in this cabin because she's gotten the house. And no one in the town likes him that much."

Despite its New York setting, *Secret Window* was filmed out of Montreal. As Cummings explained, "The topography is really similar. But the towns don't look anything like New York. So we ended up having to do the cabin north of Montreal, and the town very close to the Vermont border, in a town that had sort of a clapboard New England feel, maybe not completely Adirondack, but it certainly felt more like small-town U.S. architecture. And we ended up piecing together bits of different towns to make the one small town. That was the hardest part about making it in Montreal. Then you have to be careful with the extras and the cars, and of course all the signage is in French. So we had to redo all the signs in the place."

This was a colossal task, but one that Cummings and company did with scrupulous care. In the dark of the theater, their props, stage sets, and locations seem every bit as real as the things from which they were copied. If that kind of counterfeiting were illegal, they'd have committed the perfect crime. ●

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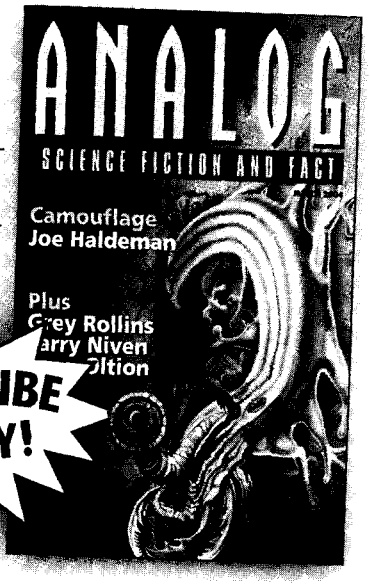

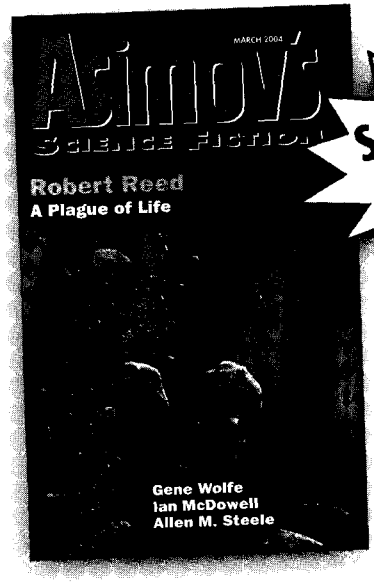

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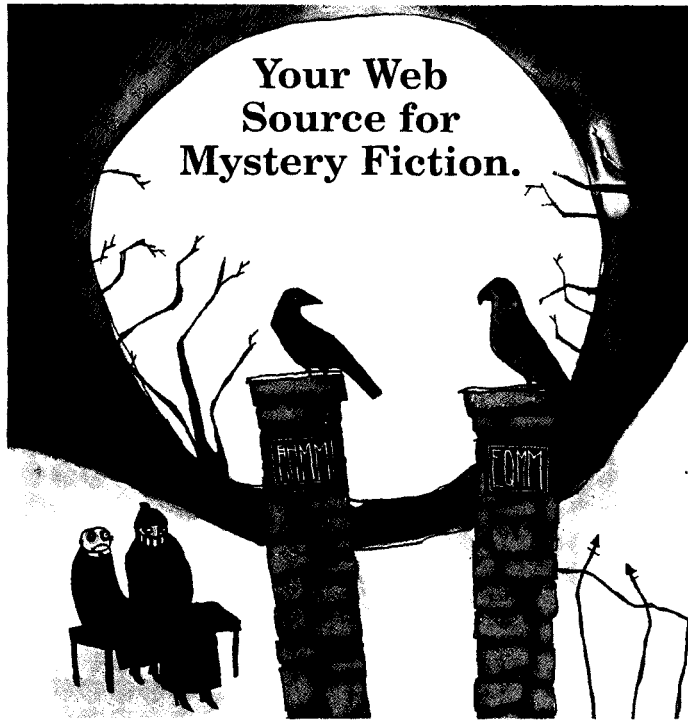

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